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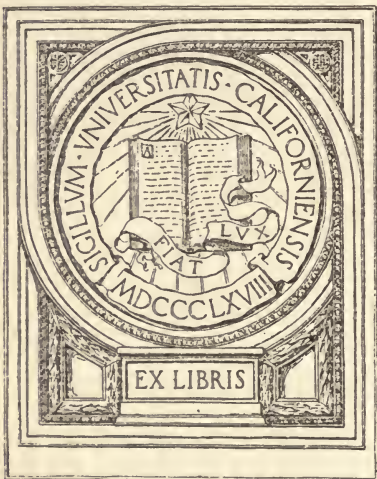
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to the

**UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
SOUTHERN BRANCH**



JOHN FISKE



THE FAIR GOD
FROM THE SPANISH OF
FERNANDO DE ALVA

RECEIVED



Lucia Pope 78



THE FAIR GOD

A TALE OF THE CONQUEST OF
MEXICO: * BY LEW WALLACE
* ILLUSTRATED BY ERIC PAPER
IN TWO VOLUMES: VOLUME I



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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

GENERAL WALLACE explains in the note which has always accompanied this tale that he assumed the guise of a translator of a fictitious narrative by an actual historical character, Fernando de Alva. It is but fair to the designer of the spirited illustrations which accompany this edition to state that his imagination has been aided by material gathered with great diligence in the country where the scenes of "The Fair God" are laid, as well as drawn from collections in scientific museums. Mr. Pape examined the treasures in the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology in Cambridge, the Metropolitan Museum, the New York Museum of Natural History, the Museum of the City of Mexico, as well as many private collections. He had recourse to the publications and records relating to Mexico and Central America to be

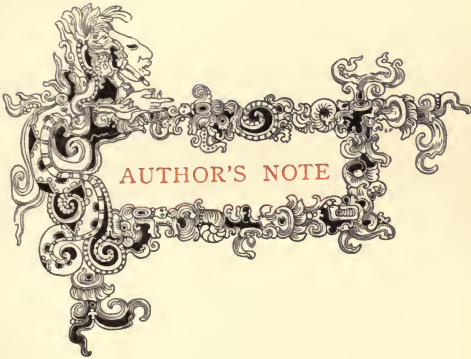
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found in public and private libraries, and he traveled widely in those countries. He covered practically the same ground as that gone over by Cortes, and visited almost all the ruins of ancient civilization in Mexico, making studies and sketches and taking a very large number of photographs. He had the advantage of using native Mexican Indians for models, and of becoming thoroughly familiarized with the aspects of the country.


In collecting and using this material, Mr. Pape set himself the further task of such researches in the ancient civilization as should make his designs truthful representations of the arts, the implements, and the manners and customs of the Aztecs. In the text decorations he has shown examples of the art of the various tribes of Mexico and Central America who inhabited those countries centuries before the Aztecs became the rulers of ancient Anahuac.

These facts are stated for the assurance of the reader, who will not need to be told of the pictorial skill which has gone to the making of the designs, but who may be glad to know that he is in the hands of a conscientious student of his subject, drawing his inspiration not only from the book he illustrates, but, like the author of the book, from the country and people imaginatively reproduced.

BOSTON, August 12, 1898.







AUTHOR'S NOTE

PERSONAL experience, though ever so plainly told, is, generally speaking, more attractive to listeners and readers than fiction. A circumstance from the tongue or pen of one to whom it actually happened, or who was its hero or victim, or even its spectator, is always more interesting than if given second-hand. If the makers of history, contradistinguished from its writers, could teach it to us directly, one telling would suffice to secure our lasting remembrance.

The reason is, that the narrative so proceeding derives a personality and reality not otherwise attainable, which assist in making way to our imagination and the sources of our sympathy.

With this theory or bit of philosophy in mind, when the annexed book was resolved upon, I judged best to assume the character of a translator, which would enable me to write in the style and spirit of one who not merely lived at the time

of the occurrences woven in the text, but was acquainted with many of the historical personages who figure therein, and was a native of the beautiful valley in which the story is located. Thinking to make the descriptions yet more real, and therefore more impressive, I took the liberty of attributing the composition to a literator who, whatever may be thought of his works, was not himself a fiction. Without meaning to insinuate that *THE FAIR GOD* would have been the worse for creation by Don Fernando de Alva, the Tezcucan, I wish merely to say that it is not a translation. Having been so written, however, now that publication is at hand, change is impossible; hence, nothing is omitted, — title-page, introductory, and conclusion are given to the reader exactly as they were brought to the publisher by the author.

L. W.

BOSTON, MASS., August 8, 1873.





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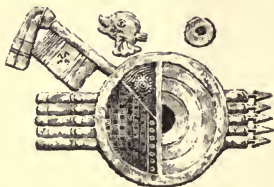
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QUETZAL AND SUNFLOWER *Cover design*

“The Quetzal (Kwetsal) [native name]. The Paradise Trogon, the most magnificent of the Trogons, of a golden green, long airy tail feathers and spray-like wings.

“The bird is about the size of a pigeon, but the long feathers project beyond the tail for two feet or more, forming a graceful spray-like train.”

It was the sacred bird of the ancient tribes of Anahuac, worshiped by them as the Scarabæus was by the Egyptians. The supreme god of the Aztecs was also called Quetzal’.

HALF-TITLE Page **i**

Design after an ancient Mexican temple door decoration.

“DID I NOT TELL YOU SO, O TULA?” (p. 251) *Frontispiece*
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The initial is a hieroglyph; the sweeping feathers were ornaments of the Aztecs. The symbolic design represents the Aztec eagle, the sun, moon, and stars, the clouds and lightning, all of which played an important part in the religious beliefs of the Aztec Mexicans.

HEADPIECE **v**

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INITIAL **v**

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INTRO
DUC
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Y

The title 'INTRO DUC TOR Y' is rendered in a red, serif font, arranged in four lines. It is framed by a large, dark, ornate border with a complex, maze-like pattern. The border is flanked by two symmetrical, intricate flourishes that resemble stylized trees or vines with leaves and flowers. The entire design is centered on a light beige background.

INTRODUCTORY



ERNANDO DE ALVA,¹ a noble Tezcucan, flourished, we are told, in the beginning of the sixteenth century. He was a man of great learning, familiar with the Mexican and Spanish languages, and the hieroglyphics of Anahuac. Ambitious to rescue his race from oblivion, and inspired by love of learning, he collected a library, availed himself of his knowledge of picture-writing, became master of the songs and traditions, and, in the Castilian language, composed books of merit.

It was scarcely possible that his labors should escape the researches of Mr. Prescott, who, with such incomparable genius, has given the world a history of the Conquest of Mexico. From him we have a criticism upon the labors of the learned Fernando, from which the following paragraph is extracted.

“Iztzilzochitl’s writings have many of the defects belonging to his age. He often crowds the

¹ Fernando De Alva Iztzilzochitl.

page with incidents of a trivial and sometimes improbable character. The improbability increases with the distance of the period; for distance, which diminishes objects to the natural eye, exaggerates them to the mental. His chronology, as I have more than once noticed, is inextricably entangled. He has often lent a too willing ear to traditions and reports which would startle the more skeptical criticism of the present time. Yet there is an appearance of good faith and simplicity in his writings, which may convince the reader that, when he errs, it is from no worse cause than the national partiality. And surely such partiality is excusable in the descendant of a proud line, shorn of its ancient splendors, which it was soothing to his own feelings to revive again — though with something more than their legitimate lustre — on the canvas of history. It should also be considered that, if his narrative is sometimes startling, his researches penetrate into the mysterious depths of antiquity, where light and darkness meet and melt into each other; and where everything is still further liable to distortion, as seen through the misty medium of hieroglyphics."

Besides his "Relaciones" and "Historia Chichimeca," De Alva composed works of a lighter nature, though equally based upon history. Some

were lost ; others fell into the hands of persons ignorant of their value ; a few only were rescued and given to the press. For a considerable period he served as interpreter to the Spanish Viceroy. His duties as such were trifling ; he had ample time for literary pursuits ; his enthusiasm as a scholar permitted him no relaxation or idleness. Thus favored, it is believed he composed the books now for the first time given to the world.

The MSS. were found among a heap of old dispatches from the Viceroy Mendoza to the Emperor. It is quite probable that they became mixed with the State papers through accident ; if, however, they were purposely addressed to His Majesty, it must have been to give him a completer idea of the Aztecan people and their civilization, or to lighten the burdens of royalty by an amusement to which, it is known, Charles V. was not averse. Besides, Mendoza, in his difficulty with the Marquess of the Valley (Cortes), failed not to avail himself of every means likely to propitiate his cause with the court, and especially with the Royal Council of the Indies. It is not altogether improbable, therefore, that the MSS. were forwarded for the entertainment of the members of the Council and the lordly personages of the court, who not only devoured with avidity, but, as the wily Mendoza well knew,

were vastly obliged for, everything relative to the New World, and particularly the dazzling conquest of Mexico.

In the translation, certain liberties have been taken, for which, if wrong has been done, pardon is besought both from the public and the shade of the author. Thus, The Books in the original are unbroken narratives; but, with infinite care and trouble, they have all been brought out of the confusion, and arranged into chapters. So, there were names, some of which have been altogether changed; while others, for the sake of euphony, have been abbreviated, though without sacrificing the identity of the heroes who wore them so proudly.

And thus beginneth the FIRST BOOK.





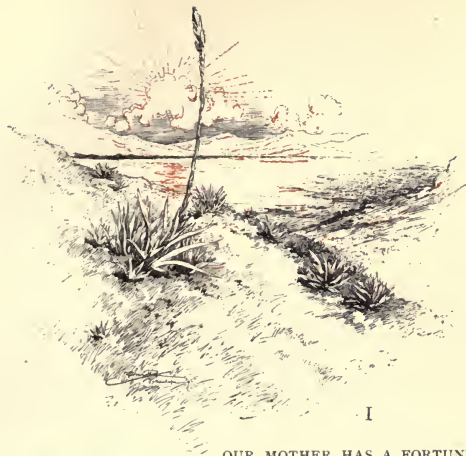
THE
FAIR GOD





BOOK ONE





I

OUR MOTHER HAS A FORTUNE
WAITING US YONDER



HE Spanish Calendar is simpler than the Aztecan. In fact, Christian methods, of whatever nature, are better than heathen.

So, then, by the Spanish Calendar, March, 1519, had about half spent itself in the valley of Anahuac, which was as yet untrod- den by gold-seeker, with cross-hilted sword at his side, and on his lips a Catholic oath. Near noon of one of its fairest days a traveler came descend- ing the western slope of the Sierra de Ahualco. Since the dawn his path had been amongst hills and crags; at times traversing bald rocks that towered to where the winds blew chill, then

dipping into warm valleys, where were grass, flowers, and streamlets, and sometimes forests of cedar and fir, — labyrinths in which there reigned a perpetual twilight.

Toilsome as was the way, the traveler, young and strong, marched lightly. His dress, of the kind prevalent in his country, was provincial, and with few signs of rank. He had sandals of buffalo-hide, fitted for climbing rocks and threading pathless woods; a sort of white tunic, covering his body from the neck to the knees, leaving bare the arms from the shoulder; *maxlatl* and *tilmatli* — sash and mantle — of cotton, blue tinted, and void of ornament; on the wrist of his left arm he wore a substantial golden bracelet, and in both ears jeweled pendants; while an ebony band, encircling his head, kept his straight black locks in place, and permitted a snow-white bird's-wing for decoration. There was a shield on his left arm, framed of wood, and covered with padded cloth, and in the left hand a javelin barbed with *'itzli*; at his back swung a *maquahuitl*, and a quiver filled with arrows; an unstrung bow in his right hand completed his equipments, and served him in lieu of staff. An ocelot, trudging stealthily behind him, was his sole companion.

In the course of his journey he came to a crag that sank bluffly down several hundred feet, commanding a fine prospect. Though the air was cold, he halted. Away to the northwest stretched the beautiful valley of Anahuac, dotted with hamlets and farmhouses, and marked with the silver

tracery of streams. Far across the plain, he caught a view of the fresh waters of Lake Chalco, and beyond that, blue in the distance and faintly relieved against the sky, the royal hill of Chapultepec, with its palaces and cypress forests. In all the New World there was no scene comparable with that he looked upon, — none its rival for beauty, none where the heavens seemed so perfectly melted into earth. There were the most renowned cities of the Empire; from that plain went the armies whose marches were all triumphs; in that air hovered the gods awaiting sacrifices; into that sky rose the smoke of the inextinguishable fires; there shone the brightest suns, and lingered the longest summers; and yonder dwelt that king — in youth a priest, then a warrior, now the terror of all nations — whose signet on the hand of a slave could fill the land with rustling of banners.

No traveler, I ween, could look unmoved on the picture; ours sat down, and gazed with brimful eyes and a beating heart. For the first time he was beholding the matchless vale so overhung with loveliness and full of the monuments of a strange civilization. So rapt was he that he did not observe the ocelot come and lay its head in his lap, like a dog seeking caresses. "Come, boy!" he said, at last rousing himself; "let us on. Our Mother¹ has a fortune waiting us yonder."

And they resumed the journey. Half an hour's

¹ The goddess Cioacoatl, called "Our Lady and Mother." Sahagun, *Hist. de Nueva Esp.*

brisk walk brought them to the foot of the mountain. Suddenly they came upon company.

It was on the bank of a considerable stream, which, pouring in noisy torrent over a rocky bed, appeared to rush with a song forward into the valley. A clump of giant oaks shaded a level sward. Under them a crowd of *tamanes*,¹ tawny, half-clad, broad-shouldered men, devoured loaves of cold maize bread. Near the roots of the trees their masters reclined comfortably on *petates*, or mats, without which an Aztec trader's outfit was incomplete. Our traveler understood at a glance the character of the strangers ; so that, as his road led directly to them, he went on without hesitation. As he came near, some of them sat up to observe him.

"A warrior going to the city," said one.

"Or rather a king's courier," suggested another.

"Is not that an ocelot at his heels?" asked a third.

"That it is. Bring me my javelin!"

"And mine! And mine!" cried several of them at once, all springing to their feet.

By the time the young man came up, the whole party stood ready to give him an armed welcome.

"I am very sorry to have disturbed you," he said quietly, finding himself obliged to stop.

"You seem friendly enough," answered one of the older men ; "but your comrade there, — what of him?"

¹ Carrier slaves, or porters.

The traveler smiled. "See, he is muzzled."

The party laughed at their own fears. The old merchant, however, stepped forward to the young stranger.

"I confess you have greatly relieved me. I feared the brute might set on and wound somebody. Come up, and sit down with us."

The traveler was nowise disinclined, being tempted by the prospect of cheer from the provision-baskets lying around.

"Bring a mat for the warrior," said the friendly trader. "Now give him bread and meat."

From an abundance of bread, fowl, and fruit the wayfarer helped himself. A running conversation was meantime maintained.

"My ocelot? The story is simple; for your sakes, good friends, I wish it were better. I killed his mother, and took him when a whelp. Now he does me good service hunting. You should see him in pursuit of an antelope!"

"Then you are not a warrior?"

"To be a warrior," replied the hunter modestly, "is to have been in many battles, and taken many captives. I have practiced arms, and, at times, boasted of skill, — foolishly, perhaps; yet, I confess, I never marched a day under the banner of the great king."

"Ah!" said the old man quizzically, "I understand you. You have served some free-trading company like our own."

"You are shrewd. My father is a merchant. At times he has traveled with strong trains, and

even attacked cities that have refused him admission to their market."

"Indeed! He must be of renown. In what province does he live, my son?"

"In Tihuanco."

"Tepaja! old Tepaja, of Tihuanco! Are you son of his?" The good man grasped the young one's hand enthusiastically. "I knew him well; many years ago we were as brothers together; we traveled and traded through many provinces. That was the day of the elder Montezuma, when the Empire was not as large as now; when, in fact, most gates were closed against us, because our king was an Aztec, and we had to storm a town, then turn its square into a market for the sale of our wares. Sometimes we marched an army, each of us carrying a thousand slaves; and yet our tasks were not always easy. I remember once, down on the bank of the Great River, we were beaten back from a walled town, and succeeded only after a four days' fight. Ah, but we made it win! We led three thousand slaves back to Tenochtitlan, besides five hundred captives, — a present for the gods."

So the merchant talked until the hunger of his new acquaintance was appeased; then he offered a pipe, which was declined.

"I am fond of a pipe after a good meal; and this one has been worthy a king. But now I have no leisure for the luxury; the city to which I am bound is too far ahead of me."

"If it is your first visit, you are right. Fail not



to be there before the market closes. Such a sight never gladdened your dreams!"

"So I have heard my father say."

"Oh, it never was as it will be to-night! The roads for days have been thronged with visitors going up in processions."

"What is the occasion?"

"Why, to-morrow is the celebration of *Queztal'*! Certainly, my son, you have heard the prophecies concerning that god."

"In rumors only. I believe he was to return to Anahuac."

"Well, the story is long, and you are in a hurry. We also are going to the city, but will halt our slaves at Iztapalapan for the night, and cross the causeway before the sun to-morrow. If you care to keep us company, we will start at once; on the way I will tell you a few things that may not be unacceptable."

"I see," said the hunter pleasantly, "I have reason to be proud of my father's good report. Certainly, I will go a distance with you at least, and thank you for information. To speak frankly, I am seeking my fortune."

The merchant spoke to his companions, and, raising a huge conch-shell to his mouth, blew a blast that started every slave to his feet. For a few minutes all was commotion. The mats were rolled up, and, with the provision-baskets, slung upon broad shoulders; each *tamane* resumed his load of wares, and took his place; those armed put themselves, with their masters, at the head;

and at another peal from the shell all set forward. The column, if such it may be called, was long, and not without a certain picturesqueness as it crossed the stream and entered a tract covered with tall trees, amongst which the palm was strangely intermingled with the oak and the cypress. The whole valley, from the lake to the mountains, was irrigated and under cultivation. Full of wonder, the hunter marched beside the merchant.





II

QUETZAL', THE FAIR GOD



WAS speaking about Quetzal', I believe," said the old man, when all were fairly on the way. "His real name was Quetzalcoatl.¹ He was a wonderfully kind god, who, many ages ago, came into the valley here, and dwelt a while. The people were then rude and savage; but he taught them agriculture and other arts, of which you will see signs as we get on. He changed the manners and customs; while he stayed, famine was unknown; the harvests were abundant, and happiness universal. Above all, he taught the princes wisdom in their government. If to-day the Aztec Empire is the strongest in the world, it is owing to Quetzal'. Where he came from, or how long he stayed, is not known. The people and their governors after a time proved ungrateful, and banished him; they also overthrew his religion, and set up idols again, and sacrificed men, both of which he had prohibited. Driven

¹ In Aztec mythology, God of the Air.

away, he went to Cholula ; thence to the seacoast, where, it is said, he built him a canoe of serpent-skins, and departed for Tlapallan, a heaven lying somewhere toward the rising sun. But before he went, he promised to return some day, and wrest away the Empire and restore his own religion. In appearance he was not like our race ; his skin was white, his hair long and wavy and black. He is said to have been wise as a god, and more beautiful than men. Such is his history ; and, as the prophecy has it, the time of his return is at hand. The king and Tlalac, the *teotuctli*,¹ are looking for him ; they expect him every hour, and, they say, live in continued dread of him. Wishing to propitiate him, they have called the people together, and celebrate to-morrow, with sacrifices and combats and more pomp than was ever seen before, not excepting the time of the king's coronation."

The hunter listened closely, and at the conclusion said : " Thank you, uncle. Tell me now of the combats."

" Yes. In the days of the first kings it was the custom to go into the temples, choose the bravest warriors there set apart for sacrifice, bring them into the *tianguex*, and make them do battle in the presence of the people. If they conquered, they were set free and sent home with presents." ²

" With whom did they combat ? "

" True enough, my son. The fight was deemed a point of honor amongst the Aztecs, and the best

¹ Equivalent to pontiff or pope.

² Sahagun, *Hist. de Nueva Esp.*

of them volunteered. Indeed, those were royal times! Of late, I am sorry to say, the custom of which I was speaking has been neglected, but tomorrow it is to be revived. The scene will be very grand. The king and all the nobles will be there."

The description excited the listener's fancy, and he said, with flushed cheeks, "I would not lose the chance for the world. Can you tell me who of the Aztecs will combat?"

"In the city we could easily find out; but you must recollect I am going home after a long absence. The shields of the combatants are always exhibited in the *tianguetz* the evening before the day of the fight. In that way the public are notified beforehand of those who take the field. As the city is full of caciques, you may be assured our champions will be noble."

"Thank you again, uncle. And now, as one looking for service, like myself, is anxious to know with whom to engage, tell me of the caciques and chiefs."

"Then you intend entering the army?"

"Well, yes. I am tired of hunting; and though trading is honorable, I have no taste for it."

The merchant, as if deliberating, took out a box of snuff and helped himself; and then he replied:

"The caciques are very numerous; in no former reign, probably, were there so many of ability and renown. With some of them I have personal acquaintance; others I know only by sight or reputation. You had better mention those of whom you have been thinking."

"Well," said the hunter, "there is Iztlil', the Tezcucan."¹

"Do not think of him, I pray you!" And the good man spoke earnestly. "He is brave as any, and perhaps as skillful, but proud, haughty, soured, and treacherous. Everybody fears him. I suppose you have heard of his father."

"You mean the wise 'Hualpilli?'"

"Yes. Upon his death, not long since, Iztlil' denied his brother's right to the Tezcucan throne. There was a quarrel which would have ended in blood, had not Montezuma interfered, and given the city to Cacama, and all the northern part of the province to Iztlil'. Since that, the latter has been discontented with the great king. So, I say again, do not think of him, unless you are careless about honor."

"Then what of Cacama?² Tezcuco is a goodly city."

"He has courage, but is too effeminate to be a great warrior. A garden and a soft couch delight him more than camps, and dancing women better than fighting men. You might grow rich with him, but not renowned. Look elsewhere."

"Then there is the lord Cuitlahua."³

"The king's brother, and governor of Iztapalapan!" said the merchant promptly. "Some have thought him better qualified for Chapultepec than Montezuma, but it is not wise to say so. His

¹ Ixtlilxochitl, son of Nezahualpilli, king of Tezcuco.

² King of Tezcuco.

³ See Prescott's *Conq. of Mexico*.

people are prosperous, and he has the most beautiful gardens in the world; unlike Cacama, he cares nothing for them, when there is a field to be fought. Considering his influence at court and his love of war, you would do well to bear shield for him; but, on the other hand, he is old. Were I in your place, my son, I would attach myself to some young man."

"That brings me to Maxtla, the Tesoyucan."

"I know him only by repute. With scarcely a beard, he is chief of the king's guard. There was never anything like his fortune. Listen now, I will tell you a secret which may be of value to you some time. The king is not as young as he used to be by quite forty summers."

The hunter smiled at the caution with which the old man spoke of the monarch.

"You see," the speaker continued, "time and palace life have changed him: he no longer leads the armies; his days are passed in the temples with the priests, or in the gardens with his women, of whom there are several hundreds; his most active amusement now is to cross the lake to his forests, and kill birds and rabbits by blowing little arrows at them through a reed. Thus changed, you can very well understand how he can be amused by songs and wit, and make favorites of those who best lighten his hours of satiety and indolence. In that way Maxtla rose, — a marvelous courtier, but a very common soldier."

The description amused the young man, but he said gravely, "You have spoken wisely, uncle, and

I am satisfied you know the men well. Really, I had no intention of entering the suite of either of them: they are not of my ideal; but there is a cacique, if reports are to be credited, beyond all exception, — learned and brave, honored alike by high and low.”

“Ah! you need not name him to me. I know him, as who does not?” And now the merchant spoke warmly. “A nobler than Guatamozin,¹— or, as he is more commonly called, the ’tzin Guatamo— never dwelt in Anahuac. He is the people’s friend, and the Empire’s hope. His valor and wisdom, — ah, you should see him, my son! Such a face! His manner is so full of sweet dignity! But I will give you other evidence.”

He clapped his hands three times, and a soldier sprang forward at the signal.

“Do you know the ’tzin Guatamo?” asked the merchant.

“I am an humble soldier, my master, and the ’tzin is the great king’s nephew; but I know him. When he was only a boy, I served under him in Tlascal. He is the best chief in Anahuac.”

“That will do.”

¹ Guatamozin, nephew to Montezuma. Of him Bernal Diaz says: “This monarch was between twenty-three and twenty-four years of age, and could in all truth be called a handsome man, both as regards his countenance and figure. His face was rather of an elongated form, with a cheerful look; his eye had great expression, both when he assumed a majestic expression, or when he looked pleasantly around; the color of his face inclined to white more than to the copper-brown tint of the Indians in general.” Diaz, *Conquest of Mexico*, Lockhart’s trans., vol. iv. p. 110.

The man retired.

"So I might call up my *tamanes*," the merchant resumed, "and not one but would speak of him in the same way."

"Strange!" said the Tihuanacan in a low tone.

"No; if you allude to his popularity, it is not strange: if you mean the man himself, you are right. The gods seldom give the qualities that belong to him. He is more learned than Tlalac or the king; he is generous as becomes a prince; in action he is a hero. You have probably heard of the Tlascalan wall in the eastern valley;¹ few warriors ever passed it and lived; yet he did so when almost a boy. I myself have seen him send an arrow to the heart of an eagle in its flight. He has a palace and garden in Iztapalapan; in one of the halls stand the figures of three kings, two of Michuaca, and one of the Ottomies. He took them prisoners in battle, and now they hold torches at his feasts."

"Enough, enough!" cried the hunter. "I have been dreaming of him while among the hills. I want no better leader."

The merchant cast an admiring glance at his beaming countenance, and said, "You are right; enter his service."

In such manner the conversation was continued, until the sun fast declined towards the western mountains. Meantime, they had passed through several hamlets and considerable towns. In nearly the whole progress, the way on either hand had

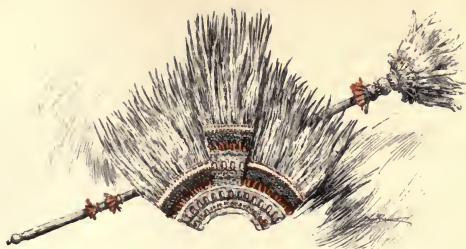
¹ Prescott's *Conq. of Mexico*, vol. i. p. 417.

been lined with plantations. Besides the presence of a busy, thriving population, they everywhere saw evidences of a cultivation and science, constituting the real superiority of the Aztecs over their neighbors. The country was thus preparing the stranger for the city, unrivaled in splendor and beauty. Casting a look toward the sun, he at length said, "Uncle, I have much to thank you for, — you and your friends. But it is growing late, and I must hurry on, if I would see the *tianguetz* before the market closes."

"Very well," returned the old trader. "We will be in the city to-morrow. The gods go with you!"

Whistling to his ocelot, the adventurer quickened his pace, and was soon far in the advance.





III

A CHALLENGE

IN the valley of Anahuac, at the time I write, are four lakes, — Xaltocan, Chalco, Xochichalco, and Tezcucó. The latter, besides being the largest, washed the walls of Tenochtitlan, and was the especial pride of the Aztecs, who, familiar with its ways as with the city, traversed them all the days of the year, and even the nights.

“Ho, there!” shouted a *voyageur*, in a voice that might have been heard a long distance over the calm expanse of the lake. “Ho, the canoe!”

The hail was answered.

“Is it Guatamozin?” asked the first speaker.

“Yes.”

“And going to Tenochtitlan?”

“The gods willing, — yes.”

The canoes of the *voyageurs* — I use that term because it more nearly expresses the meaning of the word the Aztecs themselves were wont to

apply to persons thus abroad — were, at the time, about the middle of the little sea. After the 'tzin's reply, they were soon alongside, when lashings were applied, and together they swept on rapidly, for the slaves at the paddles vied in skill and discipline.

"Iztli'l, of Tezcuco!" said the 'tzin lightly. "He is welcome; but had a messenger asked me where at this hour he would most likely be found, I should have bade him search the *chinampas*, especially those most notable for their perfume and music."

The speech was courteous, yet the moment of reply was allowed to pass. The 'tzin waited until the delay excited his wonder.

"There is a rumor of a great battle with the Tlascalans," he said again, this time with a direct question. "Has my friend heard of it?"

"The winds that carry rumors seldom come to me," answered Iztli'l.

"Couriers from Tlascala pass directly through your capital" —

The Tezcucan laid his hand on the speaker's shoulder.

"My capital!" he said. "Do you speak of the city of Tezcuco?"

The 'tzin dashed the hand away, and arose, saying, "Your meaning is dark in this dimness of stars."

"Be seated," said the other.

"If I sit, is it as friend or foe?"

"Hear me; then be yourself the judge."

The Aztec folded his cloak about him and resumed his seat, very watchful.

“Montezuma, the king” —

“Beware! The great king is my kinsman, and I am his faithful subject.”

The Tezcucan continued. “In the valley the king is next to the gods; yet to his nephew I say I hate him, and will teach him that my hate is no idleness, like a passing love. ’Tzin, a hundred years ago our races were distinct and independent. The birds of the woods, the winds of the prairie, were not more free than the people of Tezcuco. We had our capital, our temples, our worship, and our gods; we celebrated our own festivals, our kings commanded their own armies, our priesthood prescribed their own sacrifices. But where now are king, country, and gods? Alas! you have seen the children of ’Hualpilli, of the blood of the Acolhuan, suppliants of Montezuma, the Aztec.” And, as if overcome by the recollection, he burst into apostrophe. “I mourn thee, O Tezcuco, garden of my childhood, palace of my fathers, inheritance of my right! Against me are thy gates closed. The stars may come, and as of old garland thy towers with their rays; but in thy echoing halls and princely courts never, never shall I be known again!”

The silence that ensued, the ’tzin was the first to break.

“You would have me understand,” he said, “that the king has done you wrong. Be it so. But, for such cause, why quarrel with me?”

“Ah, yes!” answered the Tezcucan in an altered voice. “Come closer, that the slaves may not hear.”

The Aztec kept his attitude of dignity. Yet lower Iztzil’ dropped his voice.

“The king has a daughter whom he calls Tula, and loves as the light of his palace.”

The ’tzin started, but held his peace.

“You know her?” continued the Tezcucan.

“Name her not!” said Guatamoziin passionately.

“Why not? I love her, and but for you, O ’tzin, she would have loved me. You, too, have done me wrong.”

With thoughts dark as the waters he rode, the Aztec looked long at the light of fire painted on the sky above the distant city.

“Is Guatamoziin turned woman?” asked Iztzil’ tauntingly.

“Tula is my cousin. We have lived the lives of brother and sister. In hall, in garden, on the lake, always together, I could not help loving her.”

“You mistake me,” said the other. “I seek her for wife, but you seek her for ambition; in her eyes you see only her father’s throne.”

Then the Aztec’s manner changed and he assumed the mastery.

“Enough, Tezcucan! I listened calmly while you reviled the king, and now I have somewhat to say. In your youth the wise men prophesied evil from you; they said you were ingrate and blasphemer then: your whole life has but verified

their judgment. Well for your royal father and his beautiful city had he cut you off as they counseled him to do. Treason to the king, — defiance to me! By the holy Sun, for each offense you should answer me shield to shield! But I recollect that I am neither priest to slay a victim nor officer to execute the law. I mourn a feud, still more the blood of countrymen shed by my hand; yet the wrongs shall not go unavenged or without challenge. To-morrow is the sacrifice to Quetzal'. There will be combat with the best captives in the temples; the arena will be in the *tianguetz*; Tenochtitlan, and all the valley, and all the nobility of the Empire, will look on. Dare you prove your kingly blood? I challenge the son of 'Hualpilli to share the danger with me."

The cacique was silent, and the 'tzin did not disturb him. At his order, however, the slaves bent their dusky forms, and the vessels sped on, like wingless birds.





IV

TENOCHTITLAN AT NIGHT



THE site of the city of Tenochtitlan was chosen by the gods. In the southwestern border of Lake Tezcuco, one morning in 1300, a wandering tribe of Aztecs saw an eagle perched, with outspread wings, upon a cactus, and holding a serpent in its talons. At a word from their priests, they took possession of the marsh, and there stayed their migration and founded the city: such is the tradition. As men love to trace their descent back to some storied greatness, nations delight to associate the gods with their origin.

Originally the Aztecs were barbarous. In their southern march, they brought with them only their arms and a spirit of sovereignty. The valley of Anahuac, when they reached it, was already peopled; in fact, had been so for ages. The cultivation and progress they found and conquered there reacted upon them. They grew apace; and

as they carried their shields into neighboring territory, as by intercourse and commerce they crept from out their shell of barbarism, as they strengthened in opulence and dominion, they repudiated the reeds and rushes of which their primal houses were built, and erected enduring temples and residences of Oriental splendor.

Under the smiles of the gods, whom countless victims kept propitiated, the city threw abroad its arms, and, before the passage of a century, became the emporium of the valley. Its people climbed the mountains around, and, in pursuit of captives to grace their festivals, made the conquest of "Mexico." Then the kings began to centralize. They made Tenochtitlan their capital; under their encouragement the arts grew and flourished; its market became famous; the nobles and privileged orders made it their dwelling-place; wealth abounded; as a consequence, a vast population speedily filled its walls and extended them as required. At the coming of the "conquistadores" it contained sixty thousand houses and three hundred thousand souls. Its plat testifies to a high degree of order and regularity, with all the streets running north and south, and intersected by canals, so as to leave quadrilateral blocks. An ancient map, exhibiting the city proper, presents the face of a checker-board, each square, except those of some of the temples and palaces, being meted with mathematical certainty.

Such was the city the 'tzin and the cacique were approaching. Left of them, half a league

distant, lay the towers and embattled gate of Xoloc. On the horizon behind paled the fires of Iztapalapan, while those of Tenochtitlan at each moment threw brighter hues into the sky, and more richly empurpled the face of the lake. In mid-air, high over all others, like a great torch, blazed the pyre of Huitzil.¹ Out on the sea, the course of the *voyageurs* was occasionally obstructed by *chinampas* at anchor, or afloat before the light wind; nearer the walls, the floating gardens multiplied until the passage was as if through an archipelago in miniature. From many of them poured the light of torches; others gave to the grateful sense the melody of flutes and blended voices; while over them the radiance from the temples fell softly, revealing white pavilions, orange-trees, flowering shrubs, and nameless varieties of the unrivaled tropical vegetation. A breeze, strong enough to gently ripple the lake, hovered around the undulating retreats, scattering a largesse of perfume, and so ministering to the voluptuous floramour of the locality.

As the *voyageurs* proceeded, the city, rising to view, underwent a number of transformations. At first, amidst the light of its own fires,² it looked like a black seashore; directly its towers and turrets became visible, some looming vaguely and dark, others glowing and purpled, the whole

¹ The God of War, — aptly called the "Mexican Mars."

² There was a fire for each altar in the temples which was inextinguishable; and so numerous were the altars, and so brilliant their fires, that they kept the city illuminated throughout the darkest nights. Prescott, *Conq. of Mexico*, vol. i. p. 72.

magnified by the dim duplication below; then it seemed like a cloud, one half kindled by the sun, the other obscured by the night. As they swept yet nearer, it changed to the likeness of a long, ill-defined wall, over which crept a hum wing-like and strange, — the hum of myriad life.

In silence still they hurried forward. Vessels like their own, but with lanterns of stained *aguave* at the prows, seeking some favorite *chinampa*, sped by with benisons from the crews. At length they reached the wall, and, passing through an interval that formed the outlet of a canal, entered the city. Instantly the water became waveless; houses encompassed them; lights gleamed across their way; the hum that hovered over them while out on the lake realized itself in the voices of men and the notes of labor.

Yet farther into the city, the light from the temples increased. From towers, turreted like a Moresco castle, they heard the night-watchers proclaiming the hour. Canoes, in flocks, darted by them, decked with garlands, and laden with the wealth of a merchant, or the trade of a marketman, or full of revelers singing choruses to the stars or to the fair denizens of the palaces. Here and there the canal was bordered with sidewalks of masonry, and sometimes with steps leading from the water up to a portal, about which were companies whose flaunting, parti-colored costumes, brilliant in the mellowed light, had all the appearance of Venetian masqueraders.

At last the canoes gained the great street that

continued from the causeway at the south through the whole city; then the Tezcucan touched the 'tzin, and said, —

“The son of 'Hualpilli accepts the challenge, Aztec. In the *tianguetz* to-morrow.”

Without further speech, the foemen leaped on the landing and separated.





V

THE CHILD OF THE TEMPLE



HERE were two royal palaces in the city ; one built by Axaya', the other by Montezuma, the reigning king, who naturally preferred his own structure, and so resided there. It was a low, irregular pile, embracing not only the king's abode proper, but also quarters for his guard, and edifices for an armory, an aviary, and a menagerie. Attached to it was a garden, adorned with the choicest shrubbery and plants, with fruit and forest trees, with walks strewn with shells, and fountains of pure water conducted from the reservoir of Chapultepec.

At night, except when the moon shone, the garden was lighted with lamps; and, whether in day or night, it was a favorite lounging-place. During fair evenings, particularly, its walks, of the whiteness of snow, were thronged by nobles and courtiers.

Shortly after the arrival of Iztlil' and Guatamozin, a party, mostly of the sons of provincial governors kept at the palace as hostages, were gathered in the garden, under a canopy used to shield a fountain from the noonday sun. The place was fairly lighted, the air fresh with the breath of flowers, and delightful with the sound of falling water.

Maxtla, chief of the guard, was there, his juvenility well hidden under an ostentatious display. That he was "a very common soldier" in the opinion of the people was of small moment: he had the king's ear; and that, without wit and courtierly tact, would have made him what he was, — the oracle of the party around him.

In the midst of his gossip, Iztlil', the Tezcucan, came suddenly to the fountain. He coldly surveyed the assembly. Maxtla alone saluted him.

"Will the prince of Tezcuco be seated?" said the chief.

"The place is pleasant, and the company looks inviting," returned Iztlil' grimly.

Since his affair with Guatamozin, he had donned the uniform of an Aztec chieftain. Over his shoulders was carelessly flung a crimson *tilmatli*, — a short, square cloak, fantastically embroidered

with gold, and so sprinkled with jewels as to flash at every movement ; his body was wrapped closely in an *escaupil*, or tunic, of cotton lightly quilted, over which, and around his waist, was a *maxtlatl*, or sash, inseparable from the warrior. A casque of silver, thin, burnished, and topped with plumes, surmounted his head. His features were gracefully moulded, and he would have been handsome but that his complexion was deepened by black, frowning eyebrows. He was excessively arrogant ; though sometimes, when deeply stirred by passion, his manner rose into the royal. His character I leave to history.

“I have just come from Iztapalapan,” he said, as he sat upon the proffered stool. “The lake is calm, the way was very pleasant, I had the 'tzin Guatamo for comrade.”

“You were fortunate. The 'tzin is good company,” said Maxtla.

Iztlij' frowned, and became silent.

“To-morrow,” continued the courtier, upon whom the discontent, slight as it was, had not been lost, “is the sacrifice to Quetzal'. I am reminded, gracious prince, that, at a recent celebration, you put up a thousand cocoa,¹ to be forfeited if you failed to see the daughter of Mualox, the paba. If not improper, how runs the wager, and what of the result ?”

The cacique shrugged his broad shoulders.

¹ The Aztec currency consisted of bits of tin, in shape like a capital T, of quills of gold-dust, and of bags of cocoa, containing a stated number of grains. Sahagun, *Hist. de Nueva Esp.*

“The man trembles!” whispered one of the party.

“Well he may! Old Mualox is more than a man.”

Maxtla bowed and laughed. “Mualox is a magician; the stars deal with him. And my brother will not speak, lest he may cover the sky of his fortune with clouds.”

“No,” said the Tezcucan proudly; “the wager was not a sacrilege to the paba or his god; if it was, the god, not the man, should be a warrior’s fear.”

“Does Maxtla believe Mualox a prophet?” asked Tlahua, a noble Otompan.

“The gods have power in the sun; why not on earth?”

“You do not like the paba,” observed Iztli’l gloomily.

“Who has seen him, O prince, and thought of love? And the walls and towers of his dusty temple,—are they not hung with dread, as the sky on a dark day with clouds?”

The party, however they might dislike the cacique, could not listen coldly to this conversation. They were mostly of that mystic race of Azatlan, who, ages before, had descended into the valley, like an inundation, from the north; the race whose religion was founded upon credulity; the race full of chivalry, but horribly governed by a crafty priesthood. None of them disbelieved in star-dealing. So every eye fixed on the Tezcucan, every ear drank the musical

syllables of Maxtla. They were startled when the former said abruptly, —

“Comrades, the wrath of the old paba is not to be lightly provoked; he has gifts not of men. But as there is nothing I do not dare, I will tell the story.”

The company now gathered close around the speaker.

“Probably you have all heard,” he began, “that Mualox keeps in his temple somewhere a child or woman too beautiful to be mortal. The story may be true; yet it is only a belief; no eye has seen footprint or shadow of her. A certain lord in the palace, who goes thrice a week to the shrine of Quetzal’, has faith in the gossip and the paba. He says the mystery is Quetzal’ himself, already returned, and waiting, concealed in the temple, the ripening of the time when he is to burst in vengeance on Tenochtitlan. I heard him talking about it one day, and wagered him a thousand cocoa that, if there was such a being I would see her before the next sacrifice to Quetzal’.”

The Tezcucan hesitated.

“Is the believer to boast himself wealthier by the wager?” said Maxtla, profoundly interested. “A thousand cocoa would buy a jewel or a slave: surely, O prince, surely they were worth the winning!”

Iztzil’ frowned again, and said bitterly, “A thousand cocoa I cannot well spare; they do not grow on my hard northern hills like flowers in Xochi-

milco. I did my best to save the wager. Old habit lures me to the great *teocallis*; ¹ for I am of those who believe that a warrior's worship is meet for no god but Huitzil'. But as the girl was supposed to be down in the cells of the old temple, and none but Mualox could satisfy me, I began going there, thinking to bargain humilities for favor. I played my part studiously, if not well; but no offering of tongue or gold ever won me word of friendship or smile of confidence. Hopeless and weary, I at last gave up, and went back to the *teocallis*. But now hear my parting with the paba. A short time ago a mystery was enacted in the temple. At the end, I turned to go away, determined that it should be my last visit. At the eastern steps, as I was about descending, I felt a hand laid on my arm. It was Mualox; and not more terrible looks Tlalac when he has sacrificed a thousand victims. There was no blood on his hands; his beard and surplice were white and stainless; the terror was in his eyes, that seemed to burn and shoot lightning. You know, good chief, that I could have crushed him with a blow; yet I trembled. Looking back now, I cannot explain the awe that seized me. I remember how my will deserted me, — how another's came in its stead. With a glance he bound me hand and foot. While I looked at him, he dilated, until I was covered by his shadow. He magnified himself into the stature of a god.

¹ Temple. The term appears to have applied particularly to the temples of the god Huitzil'. TR.



‘Prince of Tezcuco,’ he said, ‘son of the wise ‘Hualpilli, from the sun Quetzal’ looks down on the earth. Alike over land and sea he looks. Before him space melts into a span, and darkness puts on the glow of day. Did you think to deceive my god, O prince?’ I could not answer; my tongue was like stone. ‘Go hence, go hence!’ he cried, waving his hand. ‘Your presence darkens his mood. His wrath is on your soul; he has cursed you. Hence, abandoned of the gods!’ So saying, he went back to the tower again, and my will returned, and I fled. And now,” said the cacique, turning suddenly and sternly upon his hearers, “who will deny the magic of Mualox? How may I be assured that his curse that day spoken was not indeed a curse from Quetzal’?”

There was neither word nor laugh, — not even a smile. The gay Maxtla appeared infected with a sombreness of spirit; and it was not long until the party broke up, and went each his way.





VI

THE CŪ OF QUETZAL', AND MUALOX,
THE PABA



VER the city from temple to temple passed the wail of the watchers, and a quarter of the night was gone. Few heard the cry without pleasure; for to-morrow was Quetzal's day, which would bring feasting, music, combat, crowd, and flowers.

Among others the proclamation of the passing time was made from a temple in the neighborhood of the Tlateloco *tianguetz*, or market-place, which had been built by one of the first kings of Tenochtitlan, and, like all edifices of that date properly called Cŭs, was of but one story, and had

but one tower. At the south its base was washed by a canal; on all the other sides it was inclosed by stone walls high, probably, as a man's head. The three sides so walled were bounded by streets, and faced by houses, some of which were higher than the Cû itself, and adorned with beautiful por-ticos. The canal on the south ran parallel with the Tlacopan causeway, and intersected the Izta-palapan street at a point nearly half a mile above the great pyramid.

The antique pile thus formed a square of vast extent. According to the belief that there were blessings in the orient rays of the sun, the front was to the east, where a flight of steps, wide as the whole building, led from the ground to the *azoteas*, a paved area constituting the roof, crowned in the centre by a round tower of wood most quaintly carved with religious symbols. Entering the door of the tower, the devotee might at once kneel before the sacred image of Quetzal'.

A circuitous stairway outside the tower conducted to its summit, where blazed the fire. Another flight of steps about midway the tower and the western verge of the *azoteas* descended into a courtyard, around which, in the shade of a colonnade, were doors and windows of habitable apartments and passages leading far into the interior. And there, shrouded in a perpetual twilight, and darkness, once slept, ate, prayed, and studied or dreamed the members of a fraternity powerful as the Templars and gloomy as the Fratres Minores.

The interior was cut into rooms, and long, winding halls, and countless cellular dens.

Such was the Cû of Quetzal', — stern, sombre, and massive as in its first days ; unchanged in all save the prosperity of its priesthood and the popularity of its shrine. Time was when every cell contained its votaries, and kings, returning from battle, bowed before the altar. But Montezuma had built a new edifice, and set up there a new idol ; and as if a king could better make a god than custom, the people abandoned the old ones to desuetude. Up in the ancient cupola, however, sat the image said to have been carved by Quetzal's own hand. Still the fair face looked out benignly on its realm of air ; carelessly the winds waved "the plumes of fire" that decked its awful head ; and one stony hand yet grasped a golden sceptre, while the other held aloft the painted shield, — symbols of its dominion.¹ But the servitors and surpliced mystics were gone ; the cells were very solitudes ; the last paba lingered to protect the image and its mansion, all unwitting how, in his faithfulness of love, he himself had assumed the highest prerogative of a god.

The fire from the urn on the tower flashed a red glow down over the *azoteas*, near a corner of which Mualox stood, his beard white and flowing as his surplice. Thought of days palmier for himself and more glorious for his temple and god struggled to his lips.

"Children of Azatlan, ye have strayed from his

¹ Sahagun, *Hist. de Nueva Esp.*

shrine, and dust is on his shield. The temple is of his handiwork, but its chambers are voiceless ; the morning comes and falls asleep on its steps, and no foot disturbs it, no one seeks its blessings. Where is the hymn of the choir? Where the prayer? Where the holiness that rested, like a spell, around the altar? Is the valley fruitless, and are the gardens without flowers, that he should be without offering or sacrifice? . . . Ah! well ye know that the day is not distant when he will glisten again in the valley ; when he will come, not as of old he departed, the full harvest quick ripening in his footsteps, but with the power of Mictlan,¹ the owl on his skirt, and death in his hand. Return, O children, and Tenochtitlan may yet live !”

In the midst of his pleadings there was a clang of sandaled feet on the pavement, and two men came near him, and stopped. One of them wore the hood and long black gown of a priest ; the other the full military garb, — burnished casque crested with plumes, a fur-trimmed *tilmatli*, *escarpil*, and *maxtlatl*, and sandals the thongs of which were embossed with silver. He also carried a javelin, and a shield with an owl painted on its face. Indeed, one will travel far before finding, among Christians or unbelievers, his peer. He was then not more than twenty-five years old, tall and nobly proportioned, and with a bearing truly royal. In Spain I have seen eyes as large and

¹ The Mexican Hell. The owl was the symbol of the Devil, whose name signifies “the rational owl.”

lustrous, but none of such power and variety of expression. His complexion was merely the brown of the sun. Though very masculine, his features, especially when the spirit was in repose, were softened by an expression unusually gentle and attractive. Such was the 'tzin Guatamo, or, as he is more commonly known in history, Guatamozin, — the highest, noblest type of his race, blending in one its genius and heroism, with but few of its debasements.

“Mualox,” said the priestly stranger.

The paba turned, and knelt, and kissed the pavement.

“O king, pardon your slave! He was dreaming of his country.”

“No slave of mine, but Quetzal's. Up, Mualox!” said Montezuma, throwing back the hood that covered his head. “Holy should be the dust that mingles in your beard!”

And the light from the tower shone full on the face of him, — the priest of lore profound, and monarch wise of thought, for whom Heaven was preparing a destiny most memorable among the melancholy episodes of history.

A slight mustache shaded his upper lip, and thin, dark beard covered his chin and throat; his nose was straight; his brows curved archly; his forehead was broad and full, while he seemed possessed of height and strength. His neck was round, muscular, and encircled by a collar of golden wires. His manner was winsome, and he spoke to the kneeling man in a voice clear, dis-



tinged, and sufficiently emphatic for the king he was.¹

Mualox arose, and stood with downcast eyes, and hands crossed over his breast.

"Many a coming of stars it has been," he said, "since the old shrine has known the favor of gift from Montezuma. Gloom of clouds in a vale of firs is not darker than the mood of Quetzal'; but to the poor paba, your voice, O king, is welcome as the song of the river in the ear of the thirsty."

The king looked up at the fire on the tower.

"Why should the mood of Quetzal' be dark? A new *teocallis* holds his image. His priests are proud; and they say he is happy, and that when he comes from the golden land his canoe will be full of blessings."

Mualox sighed, and when he ventured to raise his eyes to the king's, they were wet with tears.

"O king, have you forgotten that chapter of the *teamoxtli*,² in which is written how this Cū was built, and its first fires lighted, by Quetzal' himself? The new pyramid may be grand; its towers may be numberless, and its fires far reaching as the sun itself: but hope not that will satisfy the god, while his own house is desolate. In the name of Quetzal', I, his true servant, tell you, never again look for smile from Tlapallan."

The paba's speech was bold, and the king frowned; but in the eyes of the venerable man

¹ Bernal Diaz, *Hist. de la Conquista*.

² The Divine Book, or Bible. Ixtlil's *Relaciones*, MS.

there was the unaccountable fascination mentioned by Iztlil'.

"I remember the Mualox of my father's day; surely he was not as you are!" Then, laying his hand on the 'tzin's arm, the monarch added, "Did you not say the holy man had something to tell me?"

Mualox answered, "Even so, O king! Few are the friends left the paba, now that his religion and god are mocked; but the 'tzin is faithful. At my bidding he went to the palace. Will Montezuma go with his servant?"

"Where?"

"Only into the Cû."

The monarch faltered.

"Dread be from you!" said Mualox. "Think you it is as hard to be faithful to a king as to a god whom even he has abandoned?"

Montezuma was touched. "Let us go," he said to the 'tzin.





VII



THE PROPHECY ON THE WALL

UALOX led them into the tower. The light of purpled lamps filled the sacred place, and played softly around the idol, before which they bowed.

Then he took a light from the altar, and conducted them to the *azoteas*, and down into the courtyard, from whence they entered a hall leading on into the Cû.

The way was labyrinthine, and both the king and the 'tzin became bewildered ; they only knew that they descended several stairways, and walked a considerable distance ; nevertheless, they submitted themselves entirely to their guide, who went forward without hesitancy. At last he stopped ; and, by the light which he held for the purpose, they saw in a wall an aperture roughly excavated, and large enough to admit them singly.

“You have read the Holy Book, wise king,” said Mualox. “Can you not recall its saying that, before the founding of Tenochtitlan, a Cû was begun, with chambers to lie under the bed of the lake? Especially, do you not remember the declaration that, in some of those chambers, besides a store of wealth so vast as to be beyond the calculation of men, there were prophecies to be read, written on the walls by a god?”

“I remember it,” said the king.

“Give me faith, then, and I will show you all you there read.”

Thereupon the paba stepped into the aperture, saying, —

“Mark! I am now standing under the eastern wall of the old Cû.”

He passed through, and they followed him, and were amazed.

“Look around, O king! You are in one of the chambers mentioned in the Holy Book.”

The light penetrated but a short distance, so that Montezuma could form no idea of the extent of the apartment. He would have thought it a great natural cavern but for the floor smoothly paved with alternate red and gray flags, and some massive stone blocks rudely piled up in places to support the roof.

As they proceeded, Mualox said, “On every side of us there are rooms through which we might go till, in stormy weather, the waves of the lake can be heard breaking overhead.”

In a short time they again stopped.

"We are nearly there. Son of a king, is your heart strong?" said Mualox solemnly.

Montezuma made no answer.

"Many a time," continued the paba, "your glance has rested on the tower of the old Cû, then flashed to where, in prouder state, your pyramids rise. You never thought the gray pile you smiled at was the humblest of all Quetzal's works. Can a man, though a king, outdo a god?"

"I never thought so; I never thought so!"

But the mystic did not notice the deprecation.

"See," he said, speaking louder, "the pride of man says, I will build upward that the sun may show my power; but the gods are too great for pride; so the sun shines not on their especial glories, which as frequently lie in the earth and sea as in the air and heavens. O mighty king! You crush the worm under your sandal, never thinking that its humble life is more wonderful than all your temples and state. It was the same folly that laughed at the simple tower of Quetzal', which has mysteries" —

"Mysteries!" said the king.

"I will show you wealth enough to restock the mines and visited valleys with all their plundered gold and jewels."

"You are dreaming, paba."

"Come, then; let us see!"

They moved past some columns, and came before a great, arched doorway, through which streamed a brilliance like day.

“Now, let your souls be strong!”

They entered the door, and for a while were blinded by the glare, and could see only the floor covered with grains of gold large as wheat. Moving on, they came to a great stone table, and stopped.

“You wonder; and so did I, until I was reminded that a god had been here. Look up, O king! look up, and see the handiwork of Quetzal’!”

The chamber was broad and square. The obstruction of many pillars, forming the stay of the roof, was compensated by their lightness and wonderful carving. Lamps, lit by Mualox in anticipation of the royal coming, blazed in all quarters. The ceiling was covered with lattice-work of shining white and yellow metals, the preciousness of which was palpable to eyes accustomed like the monarch’s. Where the bars crossed each other, there were fanciful representations of flowers, wrought in gold, some of them large as shields, and garnished with jewels that burned with star-like fires. Between the columns, up and down ran rows of brazen tables, bearing urns and vases of the royal metals, higher than tall men, and carved all over with gods in bas-relief, not as hideous caricatures, but beautiful as love and Grecian skill could make them. Between the vases and urns there were heaps of rubies and pearls and brilliants, amongst which looked out softly the familiar, pale-green lustre of the *chalchuites*, or

priceless Aztec diamond.¹ And here and there, like guardians of the buried beauty and treasure, statues looked down from tall pedestals, crowned and armed, as became the kings and demi-gods of a great and martial people. The monarch was speechless. Again and again he surveyed the golden chamber. As if seeking an explanation, but too overwhelmed for words, he turned to Mualox.

“And now does Montezuma believe his servant dreaming?” said the paba. “Quetzal’ directed the discovery of the chamber. I knew of it, O king, before you were born. And here is the wealth of which I spoke. If it so confounds you, how much more will the other mystery! I have dug up a prophecy; from darkness plucked a treasure richer than all these: O king, I will give you to read a message from the gods!”

The monarch’s face became bloodless, and it had now not a trace of skepticism.

“I will show you from Quetzal’ himself that the end of your Empire is at hand, and that every wind of the earth is full sown with woe to you and yours. The writing is on the walls. Come!”

And he led the king, followed by Guatamozin, to the northern corner of the eastern wall, on which, in square marble panels, bas-relief style, were hieroglyphs and sculptured pictures of men,

¹ A kind of emerald, used altogether by the nobility. Sahagun, *Hist. de Nueva Esp.*

executed apparently by the same hand that chiseled the statues in the room. The ground of the carvings was coated with coarse gray coral, which had the effect to bring out the white figures with marvelous perfection.

"This, O king, is the writing," said Mualox, "which begins here, and continues around the walls. I will read, if you please to hear."

Montezuma waved his hand, and the paba proceeded.

"This figure is that of the first king of Tenochtitlan; the others are his followers. The letters record the time of the march from the north. Observe that the first of the writing — its commencement — is here in the north."

After a little while, they moved on to the second panel.

"Here," said Mualox, "is represented the march of the king. It was accompanied with battles. See, he stands with lifted javelin, his foot on the breast of a prostrate foe. His followers dance and sound shells; the priests sacrifice a victim. The king has won a great victory."

They stopped before the third panel.

"And here the monarch is still on the march. He is in the midst of his warriors; no doubt the crown he is receiving is that of the ruler of a conquered city."

This cartoon Montezuma examined closely. The chief, or king, was distinguished by a crown in all respects like that then in the palace; the priests, by their long gowns; and the warriors,

by their arms, which, as they were counterparts of those still in use, sufficiently identified the wanderers. Greatly was the royal inspector troubled. And as the paba slowly conducted him from panel to panel, he forgot the treasure with which the chamber was stored. What he read was the story of his race, the record of their glory. The whole eastern wall, he found, when he had passed before it, given to illustrations of the crusade from Azatlan, the fatherland, northward so far that corn was gathered in the snow, and flowers were the wonder of the six weeks' summer.

In front of the first panel on the southern wall Mualox said, —

“All we have passed is the first era in the history; this is the beginning of the second; and the first writing on the western wall will commence a third. Here the king stands on a rock; a priest points him to an eagle on a cactus, holding a serpent. At last they have reached the place where Tenochtitlan is to be founded.”

The paba passed on.

“Here,” he said, “are temples and palaces. The king reclines on a couch; the city has been founded.”

And before another panel, — “Look well to this, O king! A new character is introduced; here it is before an altar, offering a sacrifice of fruits and flowers. It is Quetzal! In his worship, you recollect, there is no slaughter of victims. My hands are pure of blood.”

The Quetzal', with its pleasant face, flowing curls, and simple costume, seemed to have a charm for Montezuma, for he mused over it a long time. Some distance on, the figure again appeared, stepping into a canoe, while the people, temples, and palaces of the city were behind it. Mualox explained, "See, O king! The fair god is departing from Tenochtitlan; he has been banished. Saddest of all the days was that!"

And so, the holy man interpreting, they moved along the southern wall. Not a scene but was illustrative of some incident memorable in the Aztecan history. And the reviewers were struck with the faithfulness of the record not less than with the beauty of the work.

On the western wall, the first cartoon represented a young man sweeping the steps of a temple. Montezuma paused before it amazed, and Guatamozin for the first time cried out, "It is the king! It is the king!" The likeness was perfect.

After that came a coronation scene. The *teotuctli* was placing a *panache*¹ on Montezuma's head. In the third cartoon, he was with the army, going to battle. In the fourth, he was seated, while a man clad in *nequen*,² but crowned, stood before him.

¹ Or *capilli*, — the king's crown. A *panache* was the head-dress of a warrior.

² A garment of coarse white material, made from the fibre of the aloe, and by court etiquette required to be worn by courtiers and suitors in the king's presence. The rule appears to have been of universal application.

“You have grown familiar with triumphs, and it is many summers since, O king,” said Mualox; “but you have not yet forgotten the gladness of your first conquest. Here is its record. As we go on, recall the kings who were thus made to stand before you.”

And counting as they proceeded, Montezuma found that in every cartoon there was an additional figure crowned and in *nequen*. When they came to the one next the last on the western wall, he said, —

“Show me the meaning of all this: here are thirty kings.”

“Will the king tell his slave the number of cities he has conquered?”

He thought a while, and replied, “Thirty.”

“Then the record is faithful. It started with the first king of Tenochtitlan; it came down to your coronation; now, it has numbered your conquests. See you not, O king? Behind us, all the writing is of the past; this is Montezuma and Tenochtitlan as they are: the present is before us! Could the hand that set this chamber and carved these walls have been a man’s? Who but a god six cycles ago could have foreseen that a son of the son of Axaya’ would carry the rulers of thirty conquered cities in his train?”

The royal visitor listened breathlessly. He began to comprehend the writing, and thrill with fast-coming presentiments. Yet he struggled with his fears.

“Prophecy has to do with the future,” he said;

“and you have shown me nothing that the sculptors and jewelers in my palace cannot do. Would you have me believe all this from Quetzal’, show me something that is to come.”

Mualox led him to the next scene which represented the king sitting in state; above him a canopy; his nobles and the women of his household around him; at his feet the people; and all were looking at a combat going on between warriors.

“You have asked for prophecy, — behold!” said Mualox.

“I see nothing,” replied the king.

“Nothing! Is not this the celebration to-morrow? Since it was ordered, could your sculptors have executed what you see?”

Back to the monarch’s face stole the pallor.

“Look again, O king! You only saw yourself, your people and warriors. But what is this?”

Walking up, he laid his finger on the representation of a man landing from a canoe.

“The last we beheld of Quetzal’,” he continued, “was on the southern wall; his back was to Tenochtitlan, which he was leaving with a curse. All you have heard about his promise to return is true. He himself has written the very day, and here it is. Look! While the king, his warriors and people, are gathered to the combat, Quetzal’ steps from the canoe to the seashore.”

The figure in the carving was scarcely two hands high, but exquisitely wrought. With terror poorly concealed, Montezuma recognized it.





“And now my promise is redeemed. I said I would give you to read a message from the sun.”

“Read, Mualox : I cannot.”

The holy man turned to the writing, and said, with a swelling voice, “Thus writes Quetzal’ to Montezuma, the king ! In the last day he will seek to stay my vengeance ; he will call together his people ; there will be combat in Tenochtitlan ; but in the midst of the rejoicing I will land on the seashore, and end the days of Azatlan forever.”

“Forever !” said the unhappy monarch. “No, no ! Read the next writing.”

“There is no other ; this is the last.”

The eastern, southern, and western walls had been successively passed, and interpreted. Now the king turned to the northern wall : *it was blank !* His eyes flashed, and he almost shouted, —

“Liar ! Quetzal’ may come to-morrow, but it will be as friend. There is no curse !”

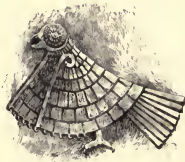
The paba humbled himself before the speaker, and said, slowly and tearfully, “The wise king is blinded by his hope. When Quetzal’ finished this chapter, his task was done ; he had recorded the last day of perfect glory, and ceased to write because, Azatlan being now to perish, there was nothing more to record. O unhappy king ! that is the curse, and it needed no writing !”

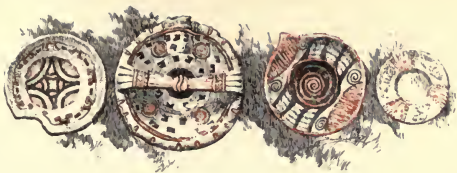
Montezuma shook with passion.

“Lead me hence ; lead me hence !” he cried. “I will watch ; and if Quetzal’ comes not on the

morrow, — comes not during the celebration, — I swear to level this temple, and let the lake into its chambers! And you, paba though you be, I will drown you like a slave! Lead on!”

Mualox obeyed without a word. Lamp in hand, he led his visitors from the splendid chamber up to the *azoteas* of the ancient house. As they descended the eastern steps, he knelt, and kissed the pavement.





VIII

A BUSINESS MAN IN TENOCHTITLAN



OLI, the Chalcan, was supposed to be the richest citizen, exclusive of the nobles, in Tenochtitlan. Amongst other properties, he owned a house on the eastern side of the Tlateloco *tianguetz*, or market-place; which, whether considered architecturally, or with reference to the business to which it was devoted, or as the device of an unassozied heathen, was certainly very remarkable. Its portico had six great columns of white marble alternating six others of green porphyry, with a roof guarded by a parapet intricately and tastefully carved; while cushioned lounges, heavy curtains festooned and flashing with cochineal, and a fountain of water pure enough for the draught of a king, all within the columns, perfected it as a retreat from the sultry summer sun.

The house thus elegantly garnished was not a *meson*, or a *café*, or a theatre, or a broker's office; but rather a combination of them all, and therefore divided into many apartments; of which one

was for the sale of beverages favorite among the wealthy and noble Aztecs, — Bacchic inventions, with *pulque* for chief staple, since it had the sanction of antiquity and was mildly intoxicating; another was a restaurant, where the *cuisine* was only excelled at the royal table; indeed, there was a story abroad that the king had several times borrowed the services of the Chalcan's *artistes*; but, whether derived from the master or his slaves, the shrewd reader will conclude from it, that the science of advertising was known and practiced as well in Tenochtitlan as in Madrid. Nor were these all. Under the same roof were rooms for the amusement of patrons, — for reading, smoking, and games; one in especial for a play of hazard called *totolouque*, then very popular, because a passion of Montezuma's. Finally, as entertainments not prohibited by the *teotuctli*, a signal would, at any time, summon a minstrel, a juggler, or a dancing-girl. Hardly need I say that the establishment was successful. Always ringing with music, and of nights always resplendent with lamps, it was always overflowing with custom.

“So old Tepaja wanted you to be a merchant,” said the Chalcan, in his full, round voice, as, comfortably seated under the curtains of his portico, he smoked his pipe, and talked with our young friend, the Tihuancan.

“Yes. Now that he is old, he thinks war dangerous.”

“You mistake him, boy. He merely thinks with me, that there is something more real in

wealth and many slaves. As he has grown older, he has grown wiser."

"As you will. I could not be a merchant."

"Whom did you think of serving?"

"The 'tzin Guatamo."¹

"I know him. He comes to my portico sometimes, but not to borrow money. You see, I frequently act as broker, and take deposits from the merchants and securities from the spendthrift nobles; he, however, has no vices. When not with the army, he passes the time in study; though they do say he goes a great deal to the palace to make love to the princess. And now that I reflect, I doubt if you can get place with him."

"Why so?"

"Well, he keeps no idle train, and the time is very quiet. If he were going to the frontier it would be different."

"Indeed!"

"You see, boy, he is the bravest man and best fighter in the army; and the sensible fellows of moderate skill and ambition have no fancy for the hot place in a fight, which is generally where he is."

"The discredit is not to him, by Our Mother!" said Hualpa laughing.

The broker stopped to cherish the fire in his pipe, — an act which the inexperienced consider wholly incompatible with the profound reflection he certainly indulged. When next he spoke, it

¹ 'Tzin was a title equivalent to *lord* in English. *Guatamo-tzin*, as compounded, signifies *Lord Guatamo*.

was with smoke wreathing his round face, as white clouds sometimes wreath the full moon.

"About an hour ago a fellow came here, and said he had heard that Iztzil', the Tezcucan, had challenged the 'tzin to go into the arena with him to-morrow. Not a bad thing for the god Quetzal', if all I hear be true!"

Again the pipe, and then the continuation.

"You see, when the combat was determined on, there happened to be in the temples two Othmies and two Tlascalans, warriors of very great report. As soon as it became known that, by the king's choice, they were the challengers, the young fellows about the palace shunned the sport, and there was danger that the god would find himself without a champion. To avoid such a disgrace, the 'tzin was coming here to-night to hang his shield in the portico. If he and the Tezcucan both take up the fight, it will be a great day indeed."

The silence that ensued was broken by the hunter, whom the gossip had plunged into revery.

"I pray your pardon, Xoli; but you said, I think, that the lords hang back from the danger. Can any one volunteer?"

"Certainly; any one who is a warrior, and is in time. Are you of that mind?"

The Chalcan took down the pipe, and looked at him earnestly.

"If I had the arms" —

"But you know nothing about it, — not even how such combats are conducted!"

The broker was now astonished.

“Listen to me,” he said. “These combats are always in honor of some one or more of the Aztec gods, — generally of Huitzil’, god of war. They used to be very simple affairs. A small platform of stone, of the height of a man, was put up in the midst of the *tianguetz*, so as to be seen by the people standing around ; and upon it, in pairs, the champions fought their duels. This, however, was too plain to suit the tastes of the last Montezuma ; and he changed the ceremony into a spectacle really honorable and great. Now, the arena is first prepared, — a central space in a great many rows of seats erected so as to rise one above the other. At the proper time, the people, the priests, and the soldiers go in and take possession of their allotted places. Some time previous, the quarters of the prisoners taken in battle are examined, and two or more of the best of the warriors found there are chosen by the king, and put in training for the occasion. They are treated fairly, and are told that, if they fight and win, they shall be crowned as heroes, and returned to their tribes. No need, I think, to tell you how brave men fight when stimulated by hope of glory and hope of life. When chosen, their names are published, and their shields hung up in a portico on the other side of the square yonder ; after which they are understood to be the challengers of any equal number of warriors who dare become champions of the god or gods in whose honor the celebration is had. Think of the approved skill and

valor of the foe ; think of the thousands who will be present ; think of your own inexperience in war, and of your youth, your stature hardly gained, your muscles hardly matured ; think of everything tending to weaken your chances of success, — and then speak to me.”

Hualpa met the sharp gaze of the Chalcan steadily, and answered, “I am thought to have some skill with the bow and *maquahuitl*. Get me the opportunity, and I will fight.”

And Xoli, who was a sincere friend, reflected a while. “There is peril in the undertaking, to be sure ; but then he is resolved to be a warrior, and if he survives, it is glory at once gained, fortune at once made.” Then he arose, and, smiling, said aloud, “Let us go to the portico. If the list be not full, you shall have the arms, — yes, by the Sun ! as the lordly Aztecs swear, — the very best in Tenochtitlan.”

And they lifted the curtains, and stepped into the *tianguetz*.¹ The light of the fires on the temples was hardly more in strength than the shine of the moon ; so that torches had to be set up at intervals over the celebrated square. On an ordinary occasion, with a visitation of forty thousand busy buyers and sellers, it was a show of merchants and merchantable staples worthy the chief mart of an empire so notable ; but now, drawn by the double attraction of market and celebration,

¹ The great market-place or square of Tlateloco. The Spaniards called it *tianguetz*. For description, see Prescott, *Conq. of Mexico*, vol. ii. book iv. ; Bernal Diaz, *Hist. de la Conquista*.

the multitude that thronged it was trebly greater ; yet the order was perfect.

An officer, at the head of a patrol, passed them with a prisoner.

“ Ho, Chalcan ! If you would see justice done, follow me.”

“ Thanks, thanks, good friend ; I have been before the judges too often already.”

So the preservation of the peace was no mystery.

The friends made way slowly, giving the Tihuancan time to gratify his curiosity. He found the place like a great national fair, in which few branches of industry were unrepresented. There were smiths who worked in the coarser metals, and jewelers skillful as those of Europe ; there were makers and dealers in furniture, and sandals, and *plumaje* ; at one place men were disposing of fruits, flowers, and vegetables ; not far away fishermen boasted their stock caught that day in the fresh waters of Chalco ; tables of pastry and maize bread were set next the quarters of the hunters of Xilotepec ; the armorers, clothiers, and dealers in cotton were each of them a separate host. In no land where a science has been taught or a book written have the fine arts been dishonored ; and so in the great market of Tenochtitlan there were no galleries so rich as those of the painters, nor was any craft allowed such space for their exhibitions as the sculptors.

They halted an instant before a porch full of slaves. A rapid glance at the miserable wretches,

and Xoli said pitilessly, "Bah! Mictlan has many such. Let us go."

Farther on they came to a platform on which a band of mountebanks was performing. Hualpa would have stayed to witness their tableaux, but Xoli was impatient.

"You see yon barber's shop," he said; "next to it is the portico we seek. Come on!"

At last they arrived there, and mixed with the crowd curious like themselves.

"Ah, boy, you are too late! The list is full."

The Chalcan spoke regretfully.

Hualpa looked for himself. On a clear white wall, that fairly glistened with the flood of light pouring upon it, he counted eight shields, or gages of battle. Over the four to the left were picture-written, "Othmies," "Tlascalans." They belonged to the challengers, and were battered and stained, proving that their gathering had been in no field of peace. The four to the right were of the Aztecs, and all bore devices except one. A sentinel stood silently beneath them.

"Welcome, Chalcan!" said a citizen, saluting the broker. "You are in good time to tell us the owners of the shields here."

"Of the Aztecs?"

"Yes."

"Well," said Xoli slowly and gravely. "The shields I do not know are few and of little note. At one time or another I have seen them all pass my portico going to battle."

A bystander, listening, whispered to his friends :



“The braggart! He says nothing of the times the owners passed his door to get a pinch of his snuff.”

“Or to get drunk on his abominable *pulque*,” said another.

“Or to get a loan, leaving their palaces in pawn,” said a third party.

But Xoli went on impressively, —

“Those two to the left belong to a surly Otompan and a girl-faced Cholulan. They had a quarrel in the king’s garden, and this is the upshot. That other, — surely, O citizens, you know the shield of Iztzil’, the Tezcucan!”

“Yes; but its neighbor?”

“The plain shield! Its owner has a name to win. I can find you enough such here in the market to equip an army. Say, soldier, whose gage is that?”

The sentinel shook his head. “A page came not long ago, and asked me to hang it up by the side of the Tezcucan’s. He said not whom he served.”

“Well, may be you know the challengers.”

“Two of the shields belong to a father and son of the tribe of Othmies. In the last battle the son alone slew eight Cempoallan warriors for us. Tlascalans, whose names I do not know, own the others.”

“Do you think they will escape?” asked a citizen.

The sentinel smiled grimly, and said, “Not if it be true that yon plain shield belongs to Guatamo, the ’tzin.”

Directly a patrol, rudely thrusting the citizens aside, came to relieve the guard. In the confusion, the Chalcan whispered to his friend, "Let us go back. There is no chance for you in the arena to-morrow; and this new fellow is sullen; his tongue would not wag though I promised him drink from the king's vase."

Soon after they reached the Chalcan's portico and disappeared in the building, the cry of the night-watchers arose from the temples, and the market was closed. The great crowd vanished; in stall and portico the lights were extinguished; but at once another scene equally tumultuous usurped the *tiangués*. Thousands of half-naked *tamanes* rushed into the deserted place, and all night long it resounded, like a Babel, with clamor of tongues, and notes of mighty preparation.





IX

THE QUESTIONER OF THE MORNING

WHEN Montezuma departed from the old Cû for his palace, it was not to sleep or rest. The revelation that so disturbed him, that held him wordless on the street, and made him shrink from his people, wild with the promise of pomp and combat, would not be shut out by gates and guards; it clung to his memory, and with him stood by the fountain, walked in the

garden, and laid down on his couch. Royalty had no medicine for the trouble ; he was restless as a fevered slave, and at times muttered prayers, pronouncing no name but Quetzal's. When the morning approached, he called Maxtla, and bade him get ready his canoe: from Chapultepec, the palace and tomb of his fathers, he would see the sun rise.

From one of the westerly canals they put out. The lake was still rocking the night on its bosom, and no light other than of the stars shone in the east. The gurgling sound of waters parted by the rushing vessel and the regular dip of the paddles were all that disturbed the brooding of majesty abroad thus early on Tezcuco.

The canoe struck the white pebbles that strewed the landing at the princely property just as dawn was dappling the sky. On the highest point of the hill there was a tower from which the kings were accustomed to observe the stars. Thither Montezuma went. Maxtla, who alone dared follow, spread a mat for him on the tiles ; kneeling upon it, and folding his hands worshipfully upon his breast, he looked to the east.

And the king was learned ; indeed, one more so was not in all his realm. In his student days, and in his priesthood, before he was taken from sweeping the temple to be arch-ruler, he had gained astrological craft, and yet practiced it from habit. The heavens, with their blazonry, were to him as pictured parchments. He loved the stars for their sublime mystery, and had faith in them

as oracles. He consulted them always; his armies marched at their bidding; and they and the gods controlled every movement of his civil polity. But as he had never before been moved by so great a trouble, and as the knowledge he now sought directly concerned his throne and nations, he came to consult and question the Morning, that intelligence higher and purer than the stars. If Quetzal' was angered, and would that day land for vengeance, he naturally supposed the Sun, his dwelling-place, would give some warning. So he came seeking the mood of the god from the Sun.

And while he knelt, gradually the gray dawn melted into purple and gold. The stars went softly out. Long rays, like radiant spears, shot up and athwart the sky. As the indications multiplied, his hopes arose. Farther back he threw the hood from his brow; the sun seemed coming clear and cloudless above the mountains, kindling his heart no less than the air and earth.

A wide territory, wrapped in the dim light, extended beneath his feet. There slept Tenochtitlan, with her shining temples and blazing towers, her streets and resistless nationality; there were the four lakes, with their blue waters, their shores set with cities, villages, and gardens; beyond them lay eastern Anahuac, the princeliest jewel of the Empire. What with its harvests, its orchards, and its homesteads, its forests of oak, sycamore, and cedar, its population busy, happy, and faithful, contented as tillers of the soil, and brave as

lions in time of need, it was all of Aden he had ever known or dreamed.

In the southeast, above a long range of mountains, rose the volcanic peaks poetized by the Aztecs into "The White Woman"¹ and "The Smoking Hill."² Mythology had covered them with sanctifying faith, as, in a different age and more classic clime, it clothed the serene mountain of Thessaly.

But the king saw little of all this beauty; he observed nothing but the sun, which was rising a few degrees north of "The Smoking Hill." In all the heavens round there was not a fleck; and already his heart throbbed with delight, when suddenly a cloud of smoke rushed upward from the mountain, and commenced gathering darkly about its white summit. Quick to behold it, he scarcely hushed a cry of fear, and instinctively waved his hand, as if, by a kingly gesture, to stay the eruption. Slowly the vapor crept over the roseate sky, and, breathless and motionless, the seeker of the god's mood and questioner of the Morning watched its progress. Across the pathway of the sun it stretched, so that when the disk wheeled fairly above the mountain-range, it looked like a ball of blood.

The king was a reader of picture-writing, and skillful in deducing the meaning of men from cipher and hieroglyph. Straightway he interpreted the phenomenon as a direful portent; and because he came looking for omens, the idea that

¹ Iztaccihuatl.

² Popocatepetl.

this was a message sent him expressly from the gods was but a right royal vanity. He drew the hood over his face again, and drooped his head disconsolately upon his breast. His mind filled with a host of gloomy thoughts. The revelation of Mualox was prophecy here confirmed, — Quetzal' was coming! Throne, power, people, — all the glories of his country and Empire, — he saw snatched from his nerveless grasp, and floating away, like the dust of the valley.

After a while he arose to depart. One more look he gave the sun before descending from the roof, and shuddered at the sight of city, lake, valley, the cloud itself, and the sky above it, all colored with an ominous crimson.

“Behold!” he said tremulously to Maxtla, “to-day we will sacrifice to Quetzal' : how long until Quetzal' sacrifices to himself?”

The chief cast down his eyes ; for he knew how dangerous it was to look on royalty humbled by fear. Then Montezuma shaded his face again, and left the proud old hill, with a sigh for its palaces and the beauty of its great cypress groves.





X

GOING TO THE COMBAT



As the morning advanced, the city grew fully animate. A festal spirit was abroad, seeking display in masks, mimes, and processions. Jugglers performed on the street corners; dancing-girls, with tambours and long elf-locks dressed in flowers, possessed themselves of the smooth sidewalks. Very plainly, the evil omen of the morning affected the king more than his people.

The day advanced clear and beautiful. In the eastern sky the smoke of the volcano still lingered; but the sun rose above it, and smiled on the valley, like a loving god.

At length the tambour in the great temple sounded the signal of assemblage. Its deep tones, penetrating every recess of the town and rushing across the lake, were heard in the villages on the distant shores. Then, in steady currents, the multitudes set forward for the *tianguetz*. The *chinampas* were deserted; hovels and palaces gave up their tenantry; canoes, gay with garlands, were abandoned in the waveless canals. The women



and children came down from the roofs ; from all the temples — all but the old one with the solitary gray tower and echoless court — poured the priesthood in processions, headed by chanting choirs, and interspersed with countless sacred symbols. Many were the pomps, but that of the warriors surpassed all others. Marching in columns of thousands, they filled the streets with flashing arms and gorgeous regalia, roar of *attabals* and peals of minstrelsy.

About the same time the royal palanquin stood at the palace portal, engoldened, jeweled, and surmounted with a *panache* of green plumes. Cuitlahua, Cacama, Maxtla, and the lords of Tlacopan, Tepejaca, and Cholula, with other nobles from the provinces far and near, were collected about it in waiting, sporting on their persons the wealth of principalities. When the monarch came out, they knelt, and every one of them placed his palm on the ground before him. On the last stone at the portal he stopped, and raised his eyes to the sky. A piece of *aguave*, fluttering like a leaf, fell so near him that he reached out his hand and caught it.

“Read it, my lords,” he said, after a moment’s study.

The paper contained only the picture of an eagle attacked by an owl, and passed from hand to hand. Intent on deciphering the writing, none thought of inquiring whether its coming was of design or accident.

“What does it mean, my lord Cacama?” asked the monarch gravely.

Cacama's eyes dropped as he replied, —

“When we write of you, O king, we paint an eagle; when we write of the 'tzin Guatamo, we paint an owl.”

“What!” said the lord Cuitlahua, “would the 'tzin attack his king?”

And the monarch looked from one to the other strangely, saying only, “The owl is the device on his shield.”

Then he entered the palanquin; whereupon some of the nobles lifted it on their shoulders, and the company, in procession, set out for the *tianguetz*. On the way they were joined by *Iztlil'*, the Tezcucan; and it was remarkable that, of them all, he was the only one silent about the paper.

The Iztapalapan street, of great width, and on both sides lined with gardens, palaces, and temples, was not only the boast of Tenochtitlan; its beauty was told in song and story throughout the Empire. The signal of assemblage for the day's great pastime found Xoli and his provincial friend lounging along the broad pave of the beautiful thoroughfare. They at once started for the *tianguetz*. The broker was fat, and it was troublesome for him to keep pace with the hunter; nevertheless, they overtook a party of *tamanes* going in the same direction, and bearing a palanquin richly caparisoned. The slaves, very sumptuously clad, proceeded slowly and with downcast eyes, and so steadily that the carriage had the onward, gliding motion of a boat.

“Lower, — down, boy! See you not the green *panache*?” whispered Xoli, half frightened.

Too late. The Chalcan, even as he whispered, touched the pavement, but Hualpa remained erect: not only that; he looked boldly into the eyes of the occupants of the palanquin, — two women, whose beauty shone upon him like a sudden light. Then he bent his head, and his heart closed upon the recollection of what he saw so that it never escaped. The picture was of a girl, almost a woman, laughing; opposite her, and rather in the shade of the fringed curtain, one older, though young, and grave and stately; her hair black, her face oval, her eyes large and lustrous. To her he made his involuntary obeisance. Afterwards she reminded many a Spaniard of the dark-eyed *hermosura* with whom he had left love-tokens in his native land.

“They are the king’s daughters, the princesses Tula and Nenetzin,” said Xoli, when fairly past the carriage. “And as you have just come up from the country, listen. Green is the royal color, and belongs to the king’s family; and wherever met, in the city or on the lake, the people salute it. Though what they meet be but a green feather in a slave’s hand, they salute. Remember the lesson. By the way, the gossips say that Guatamozin will marry Tula, the eldest one.”

“She is very beautiful,” said the hunter, as to himself, and slackening his steps.

“Are you mad?” cried the broker, seizing his arm. “Would you bring the patrol upon us?”

They are not for such as you. Come on. It may be we can get seats to see the king and his whole household."

At the entrance to the arena there was a press which the police could hardly control. In the midst of it, Xoli pulled his companion to one side, saying, "The king comes! Let us under the staging here until he passes."

They found themselves, then, close by the spears, which, planted in the ground, upheld the shields of the combatants; and when the Tihuanacan heard the people, as they streamed in, cheer the champions of the god, he grieved sorely that he was not one of them.

The heralds then came up, clearing the way; and all thereabout knelt, and so received the monarch. He stopped to inspect the shields; for in all his realm there was not one better versed in its heraldry. A diadem, not unlike the papal tiara, crowned his head; his tunic and cloak were of the skins of green hummingbirds brilliantly iridescent; a rope of pearls large as grapes hung, many times doubled, from his neck down over his breast; his sandals and sandal-thongs were embossed with gold, and besides anklets of massive gold, *cuishes* of the same metal guarded his legs from knee to anklet. Save the transparent, lustrous gray of the pearls, his dress was of the two colors, green and yellow, and the effect was indescribably royal; yet all the bravery of his trappings could not hide from Hualpa, beholding him for the first time, that, like any

common soul, he was suffering from some trouble of mind.

"So, Cacama," he said pleasantly, after a look at the gages, "your brother has a mind to make peace with the gods. It is well!"

And thereupon Iztlil' himself stepped out and knelt before him in battle array, the javelin in his hand, and bow, quiver, and *maquahuitl* at his back; and in his homage the floating feathers of his helm brushed the dust from the royal feet.

"It is well!" repeated the king, smiling. "But, son of my friend, where are your comrades?"

Tlahua, the Otompan, and the young Cholulan, equipped like Iztlil', rendered their homage also. Over their heads he extended his hands, and said softly, "They who love the gods, the gods love. Put your trust in them, O my children. And upon you be their blessing!"

And already he had passed the spears: one gage was forgotten, one combatant unblest. Suddenly he looked back.

"Whose shield is that, my lords?"

All eyes rested upon the plain gage, but no one replied.

"Who is he that thus mocks the holy cause of Quetzal? Go, Maxtla, and bring him to me!"

Then outspoke Iztlil', —

"The shield is Guatamozin's. Last night he challenged me to this combat, and he is not here. O king, the owl may be looking for the eagle."

A moment the sadly serene countenance of the

monarch knit and flushed as from a passing pain ; a moment he regarded the Tezcucan. Then he turned to the shields of the Othmies and Tlascalans.

“They are a sturdy foe, and I warrant will fight hard,” he said quietly. “But such victims are the delight of the gods. Fail me not, O children !”

When the Tihuancan and his chaperone climbed half way to the upper row of seats, in the quarter assigned to the people, the former was amazed. He looked down on a circular arena, strewn with white sand from the lake, and large enough for manœuvring half a thousand men. It was bounded by a rope, outside of which was a broad margin crowded with rank on rank of common soldiery, whose shields were arranged before them like a wall impervious to a glancing arrow. Back from the arena extended the staging, rising gradually seat above seat, platform above platform, until the whole area of the *tianguetz* was occupied.

“Is the king a magician, that he can do this thing in a single night ?” asked Hualpa.

Xoli laughed. “He has done many things much greater. The timbers you see were wrought long ago, and have been lying in the temples ; the *tamanes* had only to bring them out and put them together.”

In the east there was a platform, carpeted, furnished with lounges, and protected from the sun by a red canopy ; broad passages of entrance sep-

arated it from the ruder structure erected for the commonalty ; it was also the highest of the platforms, so that its occupants could overlook the whole amphitheatre. This lordlier preparation belonged to the king, his household and nobles. So, besides his wives and daughters, under the red canopy sat the three hundred women of his harem, — soft testimony that Orientalism dwelt not alone in the sky and palm-trees of the valley.

As remarked, the margin around the arena belonged to the soldiery ; the citizens had seats in the north and south ; while the priesthood, superior to either of them in sanctity of character, sat aloof in the west, also screened by a canopy. And, as the celebration was regarded in the light of a religious exercise, not only did women crowd the place, but mothers brought their children, that, from the examples of the arena, they might learn to be warriors.

Upon the appearance of the monarch there was a perfect calm. Standing a while by his couch, he looked over the scene ; and not often has royal vision been better filled with all that constitutes royalty. Opposite him he saw the servitors of his religion ; at his feet were his warriors and people almost innumerable. When, at last, the minstrels of the soldiery poured their wild music over the theatre, he thrilled with the ecstasy of power.

The champions for the god then came in ; and as they strode across to the western side of the arena the air was filled with plaudits and flying garlands ; but hardly was the welcome ended

before there was a great hum and stir, as the spectators asked each other why the fourth combatant came not with the others.

"The one with the bright *panache*, asked you? That is Iztlil', the Tezcucan," said Xoli.

"Is he not too fine?"

"No. Only think of the friends the glitter has made him among the women and children."

The Chalcan laughed heartily at the cynicism.

"And the broad-shouldered fellow now fixing the thongs of his shield?"

"The Otompan, — a good warrior. They say he goes to battle with the will a girl goes to a feast. The other is the Cholulan; he has his renown to win, and is too young."

"But he may have other qualities," suggested Hualpa. "I have heard it said that, in a battle of arrows, a quick eye is better than a strong arm."

The broker yawned. "Well; I like not those Cholulans. They are proud; they scorn the other nations, even the Aztecs. Probably it is well they are better priests than soldiers. Under the red canopy yonder I see his father."

"Listen, good Xoli. I hear the people talking about the 'tzin? Where can he be?"

Just then within the wall of shields there came a warrior, who strode swiftly toward the solitary gage. His array was less splendid than his comrades'; his helm was of plain leather without ornament; his *escaupil* was secured by a simple loop: yet the people knew him, and shouted; and

when he took down the plain shield and fixed it to his arm, the approbation of the common soldiery arose like a storm. As they bore such shields to battle, he became, as it were, their peculiar representative. It was Guatamozin.

And under the royal canopy there was rapid exchange of whispers and looks; every mind reverted to the paper dropped so mysteriously into the king's hand at the palace door; and some there were, acuter than the rest, who saw corroboration of the meaning given the writing in the fact that the shield the 'tzin now chose was without the owl, his usual device. Whether the monarch himself was one of them might not be said; his face was as impassive as bronze.

Next, the Othmies and Tlascalans, dignified into common challengers of the proudest chiefs of Tenochtitlan, were conducted into the arena.

The Tlascalans were strong men used to battle; and though, like their companions in danger, at first bewildered by the sudden introduction to so vast a multitude, they became quickly inured to the situation. Of the Othmies, a more promising pair of gladiators never exhibited before a Roman audience. The father was past the prime of life, but erect, broad-shouldered, and of unusual dignity; the son was slighter, and not so tall, but his limbs were round and beautiful, and he looked as if he might outleap an antelope. The people were delighted, and cheered the challengers with scarcely less heartiness than their own champions. Still, the younger Othmi appeared hesitant, and,

when the clamor somewhat abated, the sire touched him, and said, —

“Does my boy dream? What voice is in his ear that his heart is so melted? Awake! the shield is on the arm of the foe.”

The young man aroused. “I saw the sun on the green hills of Othmi. But see!” he said proudly and with flashing eyes, “there is no weakness in the dreamer’s arm.” And with the words, he seized a bow at his feet, fitted an arrow upon the cord, and, drawing full to the head, sent it cleaving the sunshine far above them. Every eye followed its flight but his own. “The arm, O chief, is not stronger than the heart,” he added, carelessly dropping the bow.

The old warrior gazed at him tenderly; but as that was no time for the indulgence of affection, he turned to the Tlascalans and said, “We must be ready: let us arm.”

Each donned a leathern helm, and wrapped himself in a quilted *escaupil*; each buckled the shield on his arm, and tightened the thongs of his sandals. Their arms lay at hand.

Such were the preparations for the combat, such the combatants. And as the foemen faced each other, awaiting the signal for the mortal strife, I fancy no Christian has seen anything more beautiful than the theatre. Among the faces the gaze swam as in a sea; the gleaming of arms and ornaments was bewildering; while the diversity of colors in the costumes of the vast audience was without comparison. With the ex-

ception of the arena, the royal platform was the cynosure. Behind the king, with a shield faced with silver, stood Maxtla, vigilant against treachery or despair. The array of nobles about the couch was imperial ; and what with them, and the dark-eyed beauties of his household, and the canopy tingeing the air and softly undulating above him, and the mighty congregation of subjects at his feet, it was with Montezuma like a revival of the glory of the Hystaspes. Yet the presence of his power but increased his gloom ; in a short time he heard no music and saw no splendor ; everything reminded him of the last picture on the western wall of the golden chamber.





XI

THE COMBAT



HE champions for the god drew themselves up in the west, while their challengers occupied the east of the arena. This position of parties was the subject of much speculation with the spectators, who saw it might

prove a point of great importance if the engagement assumed the form of single combats.

Considering age and appearance, the Tlascalans were adjudged most dangerous of the challengers, — a palm readily awarded to the Tezcucan and the 'tzin on their side. The common opinion held also, that the Cholulan, the youngest and least experienced of the Aztecs, should have been the antagonist of the elder Othmi, whose vigor was presumed to be affected by his age; as it was, that combat belonged to Tlahua, the Otompan, while the younger Othmi confronted the Cholulan.

And now the theatre grew profoundly still with expectancy.

“The day grows old. Let the signal be given.” And so saying, the king waved his hand, and sank indolently back upon his couch.

A moment after there was a burst of martial symphony, and the combat began.

It was opened with arrows; and to determine, if possible, the comparative skill of the combatants, the spectators watched the commencement with closest attention. The younger Othmi sent his missile straight into the shield of the Cholulan, who, from precipitation probably, was not so successful. The elder Othmi and his antagonist each planted his arrow fairly, as did Iztliil' and the Tlascalans. But a great outcry of applause attended Guatamozin, when his bolt, flying across the space, buried its barb in the crest of his adversary. A score of feathers, shorn away, floated slowly to the sand.

“It was well done ; by Our Mother, it was well done !” murmured Hualpa.

“Wait !” said the Chalcan patronizingly. “Wait till they come to the *maquahuil* !”

Quite a number of arrows were thus interchanged by the parties without effect, as they were always dexterously intercepted. The passage was but the prelude to a skirmish, participated in by all but the 'tzin, who, after his first shot, stood a little apart from his comrades, and, resting his long bow on the ground, watched the trial with apparent indifference. Like the Chalcan, he seemed to regard it as play ; and the populace after a while fell into the same opinion : there was not enough danger to fully interest them. So there began to arise murmurs and cries, which the Cholulan was the first to observe and interpret. Under an impulse which had relation, probably, to his first failure, he resolved to avail himself of the growing feeling. Throwing down his bow, he seized the *maquahuil* at his back, and, without a word to his friends, started impetuously across the arena. The peril was great, for every foeman at once turned his arrow against him.

Then the 'tzin stirred himself. “The boy is mad, and will die if we do not go with him,” he said ; and already his foot was advanced to follow, when the young Othmi sprang forward from the other side to meet the Cholulan.

The eagerness lest an incident should be lost became intense ; even the king sat up to see the

duel. The theatre rang with cries of encouragement, — none, however, so cheery as that of the elder Othmi, whose feelings of paternity were, for the moment, lost in his passion of warrior.

“On, boy! Remember the green hills, and the hammock by the stream. Strike hard, strike hard!”

The combatants were apparently well matched, being about equal in height and age; both brandished the *maquahuitl*, the deadliest weapon known to their wars. Wielded by both hands and swung high above the head, its blades of glass generally clove their way to the life. About midway the arena the foemen met. At the instant of contact the Cholulan brought a downward blow, well aimed, at the head of his antagonist; but the lithe Othmi, though at full speed, swerved like a bird on the wing. A great shout attested the appreciation of the audience. The Cholulan wheeled, with his weapon uplifted for another blow; the action called his left arm into play, and drew his shield from its guard. The Othmi saw the advantage. One step he took nearer, and then, with a sweep of his arm and an upward stroke, he drove every blade deep into the side of his enemy. The lifted weapon dropped in its half-finished circle, the shield flew wildly up, and, with a groan, the victim fell heavily to the sand, struggled once to rise, fell back again, and his battles were ended forever. A cry of anguish went out from under the royal canopy.

“Hark!” cried Xoli. “Did you hear the old

Cholulan? See! They are leading him from the platform!"

Except that cry, however, not a voice was heard; from rising apprehension as to the result of the combat, or touched by a passing sympathy for the early death, the multitude was perfectly hushed.

"That was a brave blow, Xoli; but let him beware now!" said Hualpa excitedly.

And in expectation of instant vengeance, all eyes watched the Othmi. Around the arena he glanced, then back to his friends. Retreat would forfeit the honor gained: death was preferable. So he knelt upon the breast of his enemy, and, setting his shield before him, waited sternly and in silence the result. And Iztzil' and Tlahua launched their arrows at him in quick succession, but Guatamozin was as indifferent as ever.

"What ails the 'tzin?" said Maxtla to the king. "The Othmi is at his mercy."

The monarch deigned no reply.

The spirit of the old Othmi rose. On the sand behind him, prepared for service, was a dart with three points of copper, and a long cord by which to recover it when once thrown. Catching the weapon up, and shouting, "I am coming, I am coming!" he ran to avert or share the danger. The space to be crossed was inconsiderable, yet such his animation that, as he ran, he poised the dart, and exposed his hand above the shield. The 'tzin raised his bow, and let the arrow fly. It struck right amongst the supple joints of the

veteran's wrist. The unhappy man stopped bewildered; over the theatre he looked, then at the wound; in despair he tore the shaft out with his teeth, and rushed on till he reached the boy.

The outburst of acclamation shook the theatre.

"To have seen such archery, Xoli, were worth all the years of a hunter's life!" said Hualpa.

The Chalcan smiled like a connoisseur, and replied, "It is nothing. Wait!"

And now the combat again presented a show of equality. The advantage, if there was any, was thought to be with the Aztecs, since the loss of the Cholulan was not to be weighed against the disability of the Othmi. Thus the populace were released from apprehension, without any abatement of interest; indeed, the excitement increased, for there was a promise of change in the character of the contest; from quiet archery was growing bloody action.

The Tlascalans, alive to the necessity of supporting their friends, advanced to where the Cholulan lay, but more cautiously. When they were come up, the Othmies both arose, and calmly perfected the front. The astonishment at this was very great.

"Brave fellow! He is worth ten live Cholulans!" said Xoli. "But now look, boy! The challengers have advanced half way; the Aztecs must meet them."

The conjecture was speedily verified. Iztli'l had, in fact, ill brooked the superior skill, or better fortune, of the 'tzin; the applause of the

populace had been worse than wounds to his jealous heart. Till this time, however, he had restrained his passion ; now the foe were ranged as if challenging attack : he threw away his useless bow, and laid his hand on his *maquahuil*.

“It is not for an Aztec god that we are fighting, O comrade !” he cried to Tlahua. “It is for ourselves. Come, let us show yon king a better war !”

And without waiting, he set on. The Otompan followed, leaving the 'tzin alone. The call had not been to him, and as he was fighting for the god, and the Tezcucan for himself, he merely placed another arrow on his bow, and observed the attack.

Leaving the Otompan to engage the Othmies, the fierce Tezcucan assaulted the Tlascalans, an encounter in which there was no equality ; but the eyes of Tenochtitlan were upon him, and at his back was a hated rival. His antagonists each sent an arrow to meet him ; but, as he skillfully caught them on his shield, they, too, betook themselves to the *maquahuil*. Right on he kept, until his shield struck theirs ; it was gallantly done, and won a furious outburst from the people. Again Montezuma sat up, momentarily animated.

“Ah, my lord Cacama !” he said, “if your brother’s love were but equal to his courage, I would give him an army.”

“All the gods forfend !” replied the jealous prince. “The viper would recover his fangs.”

The speed with which he went was all that

saved Iztlil' from the blades of the Tlascalans. Striking no blow himself, he strove to make way between them, and get behind, so that, facing about to repel his returning onset, their backs would be to the 'tzin. But they were wary, and did not yield. As they pushed against him, one, dropping his more cumbrous weapon, struck him in the breast with a copper knife. The blow was distinctly seen by the spectators.

Hualpa started from his seat. "He has it; they will finish him now! No, he recovers. Our Mother, what a blow!"

The Tezcucan disengaged himself, and, maddened by the blood that began to flow down his quilted armor, assaulted furiously. He was strong, quick of eye, and skillful; the blades of his weapon gleamed in circles around his head, and resounded against the shields. At length a desperate blow beat down the guard of one of the Tlascalans; ere it could be recovered, or Iztlil' avail himself of the advantage, there came a sharp whirring through the air, and an arrow from the 'tzin pierced to the warrior's heart. Up he leaped, dead before he touched the sand. Again Iztlil' heard the acclamation of his rival. Without a pause, he rushed upon the surviving Tlascalan, as if to bear him down by stormy dint.

Meantime, the combat of Tlahua, the Otompan, was not without its difficulties, since it was not singly with the young Othmi.

"Mictlan take the old man!" cried the lord Cuitlahua, bending from his seat. "I thought

him done for ; but, see ! he defends, the other fights."

And so it was. The Otompan struck hard, but was distracted by the tactics of his foemen : if he aimed at the younger, both their shields warded the blow ; if he assaulted the elder, he was in turn attacked by the younger ; and so, without advantage to either, their strife continued until the fall of the Tlascalan. Then, inspired by despairing valor, the boy threw down his *maquahuitl*, and endeavored to push aside the Otompan's shield. Once within its guard, the knife would finish the contest. Tlahua retreated ; but the foe clung to him, — one wrenching at his shield, the other intercepting his blows, and both carefully avoiding the deadly archery of the 'tzin, who, seeing the extremity of the danger, started to the rescue. All the people shouted, "The 'tzin, the 'tzin !" Xoli burst into ecstasy, and clapped his hands. "There he goes ! Now look for something !"

The rescuer went as a swift wind ; but the clamor had been a warning to the young Othmi. By a great effort he tore away the Otompan's shield. In vain the latter struggled. There was a flash, sharp, vivid, like the sparkle of the sun upon restless waters. Then his head drooped forward, and he staggered blindly. Once only the death-stroke was repeated ; and so still was the multitude that the dull sound of the knife driving home was heard. The 'tzin was too late.

The prospect for the Aztecs was now gloomy.

The Cholulan and Otompan were dead; the Tezcucan, wounded and bleeding, was engaged in a doubtful struggle with the Tlascalan; the 'tzin was the last hope of his party. Upon him devolved the fight with the Othmies. In the interest thus excited Iztlil's battle was forgotten.

Twice had the younger Othmi been victor, and still he was scathless. Instead of the *maquahuitl*, he was now armed with the javelin, which, while effective as a dart, was excellent to repel assault.

From the crowded seats of the theatre not a sound was heard. At no time had the excitement risen to such a pitch. Breathless and motionless, the spectators awaited the advance of the 'tzin. He was, as I have said, a general favorite, beloved by priest and citizen, and with the wild soldiery an object of rude idolatry. And if under the royal canopy there were eyes that looked not lovingly upon him, there were lips there murmuring soft words of prayer for his success.

When within a few steps of the waiting Othmies, he halted. They glared at him an instant in silence; then the old chief said tauntingly, and loud enough to be heard above the noise of the conflict at his side, —

“A woman may wield a bow, and from a distance slay a warrior; but the *maquahuitl* is heavy in the hand of the coward, looking in the face of his foeman.”

The Aztec made no answer; he was familiar with the wile. Looking at the speaker as if

against him he intended his first attack, with right hand back he swung the heavy weapon above his shoulder till it sung in quickening circles; when its force was fully collected, he suddenly hurled it from him. The old Othmi crouched low behind his shield: but his was not the form in the 'tzin's eyes; for right in the centre of the young victor's guard the flying danger struck. Nor arm nor shield might bar its way. The boy was lifted 'sheer above the body of the Otompan, and driven backward as if shot from a catapult.

Guatamozi advanced no farther. A thrust of his javelin would have disposed of the old Othmi, now unarmed and helpless. The acclamation of the audience, in which was blent the shrill voices of women, failed to arouse his passion.

The sturdy chief arose from his crouching; he looked for the boy to whom he had so lately spoken of home; he saw him lying outstretched, his face in the sand, and his shield, so often bound with wreaths and garlands, twain-broken beneath him; and his will, that in the fight had been tougher than the gold of his bracelets, gave way; forgetful of all else, he ran, and, with a great cry, threw himself upon the body.

The Chalcan was as exultant as if the achievement had been his own. Even the prouder souls under the red canopy yielded their tardy praise; only the king was silent.

As none now remained of the challengers but the Tlascalan occupied with Iztli'l, — none whom

he might in honor engage, — Guatamozin moved away from the Othmies ; and as he went, once he allowed his glance to wander to the royal platform, but with thought of love, not wrong.

The attention of the people was again directed to the combat of the Tezcucan. The death of his comrades nowise daunted the Tlascalan ; he rather struck the harder for revenge ; his shield was racked, the feathers in his crest torn away, while the blades were red with his blood. Still it fared but ill with Iztlil' fighting for himself. His wound in the breast bled freely, and his equipments were in no better plight than his antagonist's. The struggle was that of the hewing and hacking which, whether giving or taking, soon exhausts the strongest frame. At last, faint with loss of blood, he went down. The Tlascalan attempted to strike a final blow, but darkness rushed upon him ; he staggered, the blades sunk into the sand, and he rolled beside his enemy.

With that the combat was done. The challengers might not behold their "land of bread" again ; nevermore for them was hammock by the stream or echo of tambour amongst the hills.

And all the multitude arose and gave way to their rejoicing ; they embraced each other, and shouted and sang ; the pabas waved their ensigns, and the soldiers saluted with voice and pealing shells ; and up to the sun ascended the name of Quetzal' with form and circumstance to soften the mood of the most demanding god ; but all the time the audience saw only the fortunate hero,

standing so calmly before them, the dead at his feet, and the golden light about him.

And the king was happy as the rest, and talked gayly, caring little for the living or the dead. The combat was over, and Quetzal' not come. Mualox was a madman, not a prophet ; the Aztecs had won, and the god was propitiated : so the questioner of the Morning flattered himself !

“ If the Othmi cannot fight, he can serve for sacrifice. Let him be removed. And the dead — But hold ! ” he cried, and his cheeks blanched with mortal pallor. “ Who comes yonder ? Look to the arena, — nay, to the people ! By my father's ashes, the paba shall perish ! White hairs and prophet's gifts shall not save him. ”

While the king was speaking, Mualox, the keeper of the temple, rushed within the wall of shields. His dress was disordered, and he was bareheaded and unsandaled. Over his shoulders and down his breast flowed his hair and beard, tangled and unkempt, wavy as a billow and white as the foam. Excitement flashed from every feature ; and far as his vision ranged, — in every quarter, on every platform, — in the blood of others he kindled his own unwonted passion.







XII

MUALOX AND HIS WORLD



TUALOX, after the departure of the king and 'tzin, ascended the tower of the old Cû, and remained there all night, stooped beside the sacred fire, sorrowing and dreaming, hearkening to the voices of the city, or watching the mild-eyed stars. So the morning found him. He, too, beheld the coming of the sun, and trembled when the Smoking Hill sent up its cloud. Then he heaped fresh fagots on the dying fire, and went down to the courtyard. It

was the hour when in all the other temples worshippers came to pray.

He took a lighted lamp from a table in his cell, and followed a passage on deeper into the building. The way, like that to the golden chamber, was intricate and bewildering. Before a door at

the foot of a flight of steps he stopped. A number of earthen jars and ovens stood near ; while from the room to which the door gave entrance there came a strong, savory perfume, very grateful to the sense of a hungry man. Here was the kitchen of the ancient house. The paba went in.

This was on a level with the water of the canal at the south base ; and when the good man came out, and descended another stairway, he was in a hall, which, though below the canal, was dusty and perfectly dry. Down the hall farther he came to a doorway in the floor, or rather an aperture, which had at one time been covered and hidden by a ponderous flagstone yet lying close by. A rope ladder was coiled up on the stone. Flinging the ladder through the door, he heard it rattle on the floor beneath ; then he stooped, and called, —

“Tecetl, Tecetl !”

No one replied. He repeated the call.

“Poor child ! She is asleep,” he said, in a low voice. “I will go down without her.”

Leaving the lamp above, he committed himself to the unsteady rope, like one accustomed to it. Below all was darkness ; but, pushing boldly on, he suddenly flung aside a curtain which had small silver bells in the fringing ; and, ushered by the tiny ringing, he stepped into a chamber lighted and full of beauty, — a grotto carven with infinite labor from the bed-rock of the lake.

And here, in the day mourned by the paba, when the temple was honored, and its god had

worshippers, and the name of Quetzal' was second to no other, not even Huitzil's, must have been held the secret conclaves of the priesthood, — so great were the dimensions of the chamber, and so far was it below the roll of waters. But now it might be a place for dwelling, or for thought and dreaming or for pleasure, or in which the eaters of the African lotus might spend their hours and days of semi-consciousness sounding of a life earthly yet purely spiritual. There were long aisles for walking, and couches for rest; there were pictures, flowers, and a fountain; the walls and ceiling glowed with frescoing; and wherever the eye turned it rested upon some cunning device intended to instruct, gladden, comfort, and content. Lamplight streamed into every corner, ill supplying the perfect sunshine, yet serving its grand purpose. The effect was more than beautiful. The world above was counterfeited, so that one ignorant of the original and dwelling in the counterfeit could have been happy all his life long. Scarcely is it too much to say of the master who designed and finished the grotto, that, could he have borrowed the materials of nature, he had the taste and genius to set a star with the variety and harmony that mark the setting of the earth's surface, and of themselves prove its Creator divine.

In the enchantment of the place there was a peculiarity indicative of a purpose higher than mere enjoyment, and that was the total absence of humanity in the host of things visible. Painted

on the ceiling and walls were animals of almost every kind common to the clime ; birds of wondrous plumage darted hither and thither, twittering and singing ; there, also, were flowers the fairest and most fragrant, and orange and laurel shrubs, and pines and cedars and oaks, and other trees of the forest, dwarfed, and arranged for convenient carriage to the *azotcas* ; in the pictures, moreover, were the objects most remarkable in the face of nature, — rivers, woods, plains, mountains, oceans, the heavens in storm and calm ; but nowhere was the picture of man, woman, or child. In the frescoing were houses and temples, grouped as in hamlets and cities, or standing alone on a river's bank, or in the shadow of great trees ; but of their habitants and builders there was not a trace. In fine, the knowledge there taught was that of a singular book. A mind receiving impressions, like a child's, would be carried by it far enough in the progressive education of life to form vivid ideas of the world, and yet be left in a dream of unintelligence to people it with fairies, angels, or gods. Almost everything had there a representation but humanity, the brightest fallen nature.

Mualox entered as one habituated to the chamber. The air was soft, balmy, and pleasant, and the illumination mellowed, as if the morning were shut out by curtains of gossamer tinted with roses and gold. Near the centre of the room he came to a fountain of water crystal clear and in full play, the jet shooting from a sculptured

stone up almost to the ceiling. Around it were tables, ottomans, couches, and things of *vertu*, such as would have adorned the palace; there, also, were vases of flowers, culled and growing, and of such color and perfume as would have been estimable in Cholula, and musical instruments, and pencils and paints.

It was hardly possible that this conception, so like the Restful World of Brahma, should be without its angel; for the atmosphere and all were for a spirit of earth or heaven softer than man's. And by the fountain it was, — a soul fresh and pure as the laughing water.

The girl of whom I speak was asleep. Her head lay upon a cushion; over the face, clear and almost white, shone a lambent transparency, which might have been the reflection of the sparkling water. The garments gathered close about her did not conceal the delicacy and child-like grace of her form. One foot was exposed, and it was bare, small, and nearly lost in the tufted mattress of her couch. Under a profusion of dark hair, covering the cushion like the floss of silk, lay an arm; a hand, dimpled and soft, rested lightly on her breast. The slumber was very deep, giving the face the expression of dreamless repose, with the promise of health and happiness upon waking.

The paba approached her tenderly, and knelt down. His face was full of holy affection. He bent his cheek close to her parted lips, listening to her breathing. He brought the straying locks

back, and laid them across her neck. Now and then a bird came and lighted on the table, and he waved his mantle to scare it away. And when the voice of the fountain seemed, under an increased pulsation of the water, to grow louder, he looked around, frowning lest it might disturb her. She slept on, his love about her like a silent prayer that has found its consummation in perfect peace.

And as he knelt, he became sad and thoughtful. The events that were to come, and his faith in their coming, were as actual sorrows. His reflections were like a plea addressed to his conscience.

“God pardon me, if, after all, I should be mistaken! The wrong would be so very great as to bar me from the Sun. Is any vanity like that which makes sorrows for our fellows? And such is not only the vanity of the warrior, and that of the ruler of tribes; sometimes it is of the priests who go into the temples thinking of things that do not pertain to the gods. What if mine were such?

“The holy Quetzal’ knows that I intended to be kind to the child. I thought my knowledge greater than that of ordinary mortals; I thought it moved in fields where only the gods walk, sowing wisdom. The same vanity, taking words, told me, ‘Look up! There is no abyss between you and the gods; they cannot make themselves of the dust, but you can reach their summit almost a god.’ And I labored, seeking the principles



that would accomplish my dream, if such it were. Heaven forgive me, but I once thought I had found them! Other men looking out on creation could see nothing but Wisdom — Wisdom everywhere; but I looked with a stronger vision, and wherever there was a trace of infinite WISDOM, there was also for me an infinite WILL.

“Here were the principles, but they were not enough. Something said to me, ‘What were the Wisdom and Will of the gods without subjects?’ It was a great idea: I thought I stood almost upon the summit!

“And I set about building me a world. I took the treasure of Quetzal’, and collected these marvels, and bought me the labor of art. Weavers, florists, painters, masons, — all toiled for me. Gold, labor, and time are here, — there is little beauty without them. Here is my world,” he said aloud, glancing around the great hall.

“I had my world; next I wanted a subject for my will. But where to go? Not among men, — alas, they are their own slaves! One day I stood in the *tianguex* where a woman was being sold. A baby in her arms smiled, it might have been at the sunshine, it might have been at me. The mother said, ‘Buy.’ A light flashed upon me — I bought you, my poor child. Men say of the bud, It will be a rose, and of the plant, It will be a tree; you were so young then that I said, ‘It will be a mind.’ And into my world I brought you, thinking, as I had made it, so I would make a subject. This, I told you, was your birthplace;

and here passed your infancy and childhood; here you have dwelt. Your cheeks are pale, my little one, but full and fresh; your breath is sweet as the air above a garden; and you have grown in beauty, knowing nothing living but the birds and me. My will has a subject, O Tecetl, and my heart a child. And judge me, holy Quetzal', if I have not tried to make her happy! I have given her knowledge of everything but humanity, and ignorance of that is happiness. My world has thus far been a heaven to her; her dreams have been of it; I am its god!"

And yet unwilling to disturb her slumber, Mualex arose, and walked away.





XIII

THE SEARCH FOR QUETZAL'



Y and by he returned, and, standing by the couch, passed his hand several times above her face. Silent as the movements were, she awoke, and threw her arms around his neck.

“You have been gone a long while,” she said in a childish voice. “I waited for you; but the lamps burned down low, and the shadows, from their hiding among the bushes, came creeping in upon the fountain, and I slept.”

“I saw you,” he answered, playing with her hair. “I saw you; I always see you.”

“I tried to paint the fountain,” she went on ; “but when I watched the water to catch its colors, I thought its singing changed to voices, and, listening to them, they stole my thoughts away. Then I tried to blend my voice with them, and sing as they sung ; but whenever mine sank low enough, it seemed sad, while they went on gayer and more ringing than ever. I can paint the flowers, but not the water ; I can sing with the birds, but not with the fountain. But you promised to call me, — that you would always call me.”

“I knew you were asleep.”

“But you had only to think to waken me.”

He smiled at this acknowledgment of the power of his will. Just then a bell sounded faintly through the chamber ; hastening away, he shortly returned with breakfast on a great shell waiter ; there were maize bread and honey, quails and chocolate, figs and oranges. Placing them on a table, he rolled up an ottoman for the girl ; and, though she talked much and lightly, the meal was soon over. Then he composed himself upon the couch, and in the quiet, unbroken save by Tecetl, forgot the night and its incidents.

His rest was calm ; when he awoke, she was sitting by the basin of the fountain talking to her birds gleefully as a child. She had given them names, words more of sound pleasant to the ear than of signification ; so she understood the birds, whose varied cries were to her a language. And they were fearless and tame, perching on her

hand, and courting her caresses ; while she was as artless, with a knowledge as innocent, and a nature as happy. If Quetzal' was the paba's idol in religion, she was his idol in affection.

He watched her a while, then suddenly sat up ; though he said not a word, she flung her birds off, and came to him smiling.

“ You called me, father.”

He laid his hand upon her shoulder, all overflowed with the dark hair, and said in a low voice, “ The time approaches when Quetzal' is to come from the home of the gods ; it may be he is near. I will send you over the sea and the land to find him ; you shall have wings to carry you into the air ; and you shall fly swifter than the birds you have been talking to.”

Her smile deepened.

“ Have you not told me that Quetzal' is good, and that his voice is like the fountain's, and that when he speaks it is like singing ? I am ready.”

He kissed her, and nearer the basin rolled the couch, upon which she sat reclined against a heap of cushions, her hands clasped over her breast.

“ Do not let me be long gone ! ” she said. “ The lamps will burn low again, and I do not like to have the shadows come and fold up my flowers.”

The paba took a pearl from the folds of his gown, and laid it before her ; then he sat down, and fixed his eyes upon her face ; she looked at the jewel, and composed herself as for sleep. Her hands settled upon her bosom, her features

grew impassive, the lips slowly parted ; gradually her eyelids drooped, and the life running in the veins of her cheeks and forehead went back into her heart. Out of the pearl seemed to issue a spell that stole upon her spirits gently as an atomy settles through the still air. Finally, there was a sigh, a sob, and over the soul of the maiden the will of Mualox became absolute. He took her hand in his.

“Wings swifter than the winds are yours, Tecetl. Go,” he said, “search for the god ; search the land.”

She moved not, and scarcely breathed.

“Speak,” he continued ; “let me know that I am obeyed.”

The will was absolute ; she spoke, and though at first the words came slowly, yet he listened like a prophet waiting for revelation. She spoke of the land, of its rivers, forests, and mountains ; she spoke of the cities, of their streets and buildings, and of their people, for whom she knew no name. She spoke of events transpiring in distant provinces, as well as in Tenochtitlan. She went into the temples, markets, and palaces. Wherever men traveled, thither her spirit flew. When the flight was done, and her broken description ceased, the holy man sighed.

“Not yet, Tecetl ; he is not found. The god is not on the land. Search the air.”

And still the will was absolute, though the theme of the seer changed ; it was not of the land now, but of the higher realm ; she spoke of the

sunshine and the cloud, of the wind rushing and chill, of the earth far down, and grown so small that the mountains leveled with the plains.

“Not yet, not yet,” he cried; “the god is not in the air. Go search the sea!”

In the hollow of his hand he lifted water, and sprinkled her face; and when he resumed his seat she spoke, not slowly as before, but fast and free.

“The land is passed; behind me are the cities and lakes, and the great houses and blue waters, such as I have seen in my pictures. I am hovering now, father, where there is nothing before me but waves and distance. White birds go skimming about careless of the foam; the winds pour upon me steadily; and in my ear is a sound as of a great voice. I listen, and it is the sea; or, father, it may be the voice of the god whom you seek.”

She was silent, as if waiting for an answer.

“The water, is it? Well, well,—whither shall I go now?”

“Follow the shore; it may lead where only gods have been.”

“Still the waves and the distance, and the land, where it goes down into the sea sprinkled with shells. Still the deep voice in my ear, and the wind about me. I hurry on, but it is all alike,—all water and sound. No! Out of the waves rises a new land, the sea, a girdle of billows, encircling it everywhere; yet there are blue clouds ascending from the fields, and I see palm-trees and temples. May not thy god dwell here?”

“No. You see but an island. On!”

“Well, well. Behind me fades the island; before me is nothing but sheen and waves and distance again; far around runs the line separating the sea and sky. Waste, all waste; the sea all green, the sky all blue; no life; no god. But stay!”

“Something moves on the waste: speak, child!”

But for a time she was still.

“Speak!” he said, earnestly. “Speak, Tecet!”

“They are far off, — far off,” she replied slowly and in a doubting way. “They move and live, but I cannot tell whether they come or go, or what they are. Their course is unsteady, and, like the flight of birds, now upon the sea, then in air, a moment seeming of the waves, then of the sky. They look like white clouds.”

“You are fleetier than birds or clouds, — nearer!” he said sternly, the fire in his eyes all alight.

“I go, — I approach them, — I now see them coming. O father, father! I know not what your god is like, nor what shape he takes, nor in what manner he travels; but surely these are his! There are many of them, and as they sweep along they are a sight to be looked at with trembling.”

“What are they, Tecet?”

“How can I answer? They are not of the things I have seen in my pictures, nor heard in my songs. The face of the sea is whitened by them; the largest leads the way, looking like a

shell, — of them I have heard you speak as coming from the sea, — a great shell streaked with light and shade, and hollow, so that the sides rise above the reach of the waves, — wings” —

“Nay, what would a god of the air with wings to journey upon the sea!”

“Above it are clouds, — clouds white as the foam, and such as a god might choose to waft him on his way. I can see them sway and toss, but as the shell rushes into the hollow places, they lift it up, and drive it on.”

A brighter light flashed from his eyes. “It is the canoe, the canoe!” he exclaimed. “The canoe from Tlapallan!”

“The canoe, father! The waves rush joyously around it; they lift themselves in its path, and roll on to meet it; then, as if they knew it to be a god’s, in peace make way for its coming. Upon the temples in my pictures I have seen signs floating in the air” —

“You mean banners, — banners, child,” he said tremulously.

“I remember now. Above the foremost canoe, above its clouds, there is a banner, and it is black” —

“’Tis Quetzal’s! ’Tis Quetzal’s!” he muttered.

“It is black, with golden embroidery, and something picture-written on it, but what I cannot tell.”

“Look in the canoe.”

"I see — O, I know not what to call them."

"Of what shape are they, child?"

"Yours, father."

"Go on : they are gods!" he said, and still the naming of men was unheard in the great chamber.

"There are many of them," she continued ; "their garments flash and gleam ; around one like themselves they are met ; to me he seems the superior god ; he is speaking, they are listening. He is taller than you, father, and has a fair face, and hair and beard like the hue of his banner. His garments are the brightest of all."

"You have described a god ; it is Quetzal', the holy, beautiful Quetzal'!" he said, with rising voice. "Look if his course be toward the land."

"Every canoe moves toward the shore."

"Enough!" he cried. "The writing on the wall is the god's!" And, rising, he awoke the girl.

As Tecetl awake had no recollection of her journey, or of what she had seen in its course, she wondered at his trouble and excitement, and spoke to him, without answer.

"Father, what has Tecetl done that you should be so troubled?"

He put aside her arms, and in silence turned slowly from the pleasant place, and retraced his steps back through the halls of the Cû to the courtyard and *azoteas*.

The weight of the secret did not oppress him ; it rested upon him lightly as the surplice upon

his shoulders ; for the humble servant of his god was lifted above his poverty and trembling, and, vivified by the consciousness of inspiration, felt more than a warrior's strength. But what should he do ? Where proclaim the revelation ? Upon the temple ?

"The streets are deserted ; the people are in the theatre ; the king is there with all Anahuac," he muttered. "The coming of Quetzal' concerns the Empire, and it shall hear the announcement : so not on the temple, but to the *tianguetz*. The god speaks to me ! To the *tianguetz* !"

In the chapel he exchanged his white surplice for the regalia of sacrifice. Never before, to his fancy, wore the idol such seeming of life. Satisfaction played grimly about its mouth ; upon its brow, like a coronet, sat the infinite Will. From the chapel he descended to the street that led to the great square. Insensibly, as he hurried on, his steps quickened ; and, bareheaded and unsandaled, his white beard and hair loose and flowing, and his face beaming with excitement, he looked the very embodiment of direful prophecy. On the streets he met only slaves. At the theatre the entrance was blocked by people ; soldiery guarded the arena : but guard and people shrunk at his approach ; and thus, without word or cry, he rushed within the wall of shields, where were none but the combatants, living and dead.

Midway the arena he halted, his face to the king. Around ran his wondrous glance, and, regardless of the royalty present, the people shouted,

“The paba, the paba!” and their many voices shook the theatre. Flinging the white locks back on his shoulders, he tossed his arms aloft; and the tumult rose into the welkin, and a calm settled over the multitude. Montezuma, with the malediction warm on his lips, bent from his couch to hear his words.

“Woe is Tenochtitlan, the beautiful!” he cried, in the unmeasured accents of grief. “Woe to homes, and people, and armies, and king! Why this gathering of dwellers on the hills and in the valleys? Why the combat of warriors? Quetzal’ is at hand. He comes for vengeance. Woe is Tenochtitlan, the beautiful! . . . This, O king, is the day of the fulfilment of prophecy. From out the sea, wafted by clouds, even now the canoes of the god are coming. His power whitens the waves, and the garments of his warriors gleam with the light of the sky. Woe is Tenochtitlan! This day is the last of her perfect glory; to-morrow Quetzal’ will glisten on the seashore, and her Empire vanish forever. . . .

PEOPLE, say farewell to peace! Keepers of the temples, holy men, go feed the fires, and say the prayer, and sacrifice the victim! And thou, O king! summon thy strong men, leaders in battle, and be thy banners counted, and thy nations marshaled. In vain! Woe is Tenochtitlan! Sitting in the lake, she shines lustroly as a star; and though in a valley of gardens, she is like a great tree shadowing in a desert. But the ravager comes, and the tree shall be felled, and the

star go out darkling forever. The fires shall fade, the bones of the dead kings be scattered, altars and gods overthrown, and every temple leveled with the streets. Woe is Tenochtitlan! Ended, —ended forever is the march of Azatlan, the mighty!"

His arms fell down, and, without further word, his head bowed upon his breast, the prophet departed. The spell he left behind him remained unbroken. As they recovered from the effects of his bodement, the people left the theatre, their minds full of indefinite dread. If perchance they spoke of the scene as they went, it was in whispers, and rather to sound the depths of each other's alarm. And for the rest of the day they remained in their houses, brooding alone, or collected in groups, talking in low voices, wondering about the prescience of the paba, and looking each moment for the development of something more terrible.

The king watched the holy man until he disappeared in the crowded passage; then a deadly paleness overspread his face, and he sunk almost to the platform. The nobles rushed around, and bore him to his palanquin, their brave souls astonished that the warrior and priest and mighty monarch could be so overcome. They carried him to his palace, and left him to a solitude full of unkingly superstitions.

Guatamozin, serene amid the confusion, called the *tamanes*, and ordered the old Othmi and the dead removed. The Tezcucan still breathed.

“The reviler of the gods shall be cared for,” he said to himself. “If he lives, their justice will convict him.”

Before the setting of the sun, the structure in the *tianguex* was taken down and restored to the temples, never again to be used. Yet the market-place remained deserted and vacant; the whole city seemed plague-smitten.

And the common terror was not without cause, any more than Mualox was without inspiration. That night the ships of Cortes, eleven in number, and freighted with the materials of conquest from the east of Yucatan, came sweeping down the bay of Campeachy. Next morning they sailed up the Rio de Tabasco, beautiful with its pure water and its banks fringed with mangroves. Tecetl had described the fleet, the sails of which from afar looked like clouds, while they did, indeed, whiten the sea.

Next evening a courier sped hotly over the causeway and up the street, stopping at the gate of the royal palace. He was taken before the king; and, shortly after, it went flying over the city how Quetzal' had arrived, in canoes larger than temples, wafted by clouds, and full of thunder and lightning. Then sank the monarch's heart; and, though the Spaniard knew it not, his marvelous conquest was half completed before his iron shoe smote the shore at San Juan de Ulloa.¹

¹ Cortes's squadron reached the mouth of the river Tabasco on the 12th of March, 1519.



BOOK TWO





f

WHO ARE THE STRANGERS



ARCH passed, and April came, and still the strangers, in their great canoes, lingered on the coast. Montezuma observed them with becoming prudence; through his lookouts, he was informed of their progress from the time they left the Rio de Tabasco.

The constant anxiety to which he was subjected affected his temper; and, though roused from the torpor into which he had been plunged by the visit to the golden chamber, and the subsequent prophecy of Mualox, his melancholy was a thing of common observation. He renounced his ordinary amusements, even *totoloque*, and went no more to the hunting-grounds on the shore of the lake; in preference he took long walks in the gardens and reclined in the audience-chamber of his palace; yet more

remarkable, conversation with his councilors and nobles delighted him more than the dances of his women or the songs of his minstrels. In truth, the monarch was himself a victim of the delusions he had perfected for his people. Polytheism had come to him with the Empire; but he had enlarged upon it, and covered it with dogmas; and so earnestly, through a long and glorious reign, had he preached them, that, at last, he had become his own most zealous convert. In all his dominions, there was not one whom faith more inclined to absolute fear of Quetzal' than himself.

One evening he passed from his bath to the dining-hall for the last meal of the day. Invigorated, and, as was his custom, attired for the fourth time since morning in fresh garments, he walked briskly, and even droned a song.

No monarch in Europe fared more sumptuously than Montezuma. The room devoted to the purpose was spacious, and, on this occasion, brilliantly lighted. The floor was spread with figured matting, and the walls hung with beautiful tapestry; and in the centre of the apartment a luxurious couch had been rolled for him, it being his habit to eat reclining; while, to hide him from the curious, a screen had been contrived, and set up between the couch and principal door. The viands set down by his steward as the substantials of the first course were arranged upon the floor before the couch, and kept warm and smoking by chafing-dishes. The table, if such it may be called, was supplied by contribu-

tions from the provinces, and furnished, in fact, no contemptible proof of his authority, and the perfection with which it was exercised. The ware was of the finest Cholulan manufacture, and, like his clothes, never used by him but the once, a royal custom requiring him to present it to his friends.¹

When he entered the room, the evening I have mentioned, there were present only his steward, four or five aged councilors, whom he was accustomed to address as "uncles," and a couple of women, who occupied themselves in preparing certain wafers and confections which he particularly affected. He stretched himself comfortably upon the couch, much, I presume, after the style of the Romans, and at once began the meal. The ancients moved back several steps, and a score of boys, noble, yet clad in the inevitable *nequen*, responding to a bell, came in and posted themselves to answer his requests.

Sometimes, by invitation, the councilors were permitted to share the feast; oftener, however, the only object of their presence was to afford him the gratification of remark. The conversation was usually irregular, and hushed and renewed as he prompted, and not unfrequently extended to the gravest political and religious subjects. On the evening in question he spoke to them kindly.

"I feel better this evening, uncles. My good star is rising above the mists that have clouded

¹ Prescott, *Conq. of Mexico*.

it. We ought not to complain of what we cannot help; still, I have thought that when the gods retained the power to afflict us with sorrows, they should have given us some power to correct them."

One of the old men answered reverentially, "A king should be too great for sorrows; he should wear his crown against them as we wear our mantles against the cold winds."

"A good idea," said the monarch, smiling; "but you forget that the crown, instead of protecting, is itself the trouble. Come nearer, uncles; there is a matter more serious about which I would hear your minds."

They obeyed him, and he went on.

"The last courier brought me word that the strangers were yet on the coast, hovering about the islands. Tell me, who say you they are, and whence do they come?"

"How may we know more than our wise master?" said one of them.

"And our thoughts,—do we not borrow them from you, O king?" added another.

"What! Call you those answers? Nay, uncles, my fools can better serve me; if they cannot instruct, they can at least amuse."

The king spoke bitterly, and looking at one, probably the oldest of them all, said,—

"Uncle, you are the poorest courtier, but you are discreet and honest. I want opinions that have in them more wisdom than flattery. Speak to me truly: who are these strangers?"

“For your sake, O my good king, I wish I were wise; for the trouble they have given my poor understanding is indeed very great. I believe them to be gods, landed from the Sun.” And the old man went on to fortify his belief with arguments. In the excited state of his fancy, it was easy for him to convert the cannon of the Spaniards into engines of thunder and lightning, and transform their horses into creatures of Mictlan mightier than men. Right summarily he also concluded, that none but gods could traverse the dominions of Haloc,¹ subjecting the variant winds to their will. Finally, to prove the strangers irresistible, he referred to the battle of Tabasco, then lately fought between Cortes and the Indians.

Montezuma heard him in silence, and replied, “Not badly given, uncle; your friends may profit by your example; but you have not talked as a warrior. You have forgotten that we, too, have beaten the lazy Tabascans. That reference proves as much for my caciques as for your gods.”

He waved his hand, and the first course was removed. The second consisted for the most part of delicacies in the preparation of which his *artistes* delighted; at this time appeared the *chocolatl*, a rich, frothy beverage served in *xicaras*, or small golden goblets. Girls, selected for their rank and beauty, succeeded the boys. Flocking around him with light and echoless feet, very graceful, very happy, theirs was indeed the service

¹ God of the sea.

that awaits the faithful in Mahomet's Paradise. To each of his ancients he passed a goblet of *choclatl*, then continued his eating and talking.

"Yes. Be they gods or men, I would give a province to know their intention; that, uncles, would enable me to determine my policy, — whether to give them war or peace. As yet, they have asked nothing but the privilege of trading with us; and judging them by our nations, I want not better warrant of friendship. As you know, strangers have twice before been upon our coast in such canoes, and with such arms;¹ and in both instances they sought gold, and getting it they departed. Will these go like them?"

"Has my master forgotten the words of Mualox?"

"To Mictlan with the paba!" said the king, violently. "He has filled my cities and people with trouble."

"Yet he is a prophet," retorted the old counselor boldly. "How knew he of the coming of the strangers before it was known in the palace?"

The flush of the king's face faded.

"It is a mystery, uncle, — a mystery too deep for me. All the day and night before he was in his Cû; he went not into the city even."

"If the wise master will listen to the words of his slave, he will not again curse the paba, but make him a friend."

The monarch's lip curled derisively.

¹ The allusion was doubtless to the expeditions of Hernandez de Cordova, in 1517, and Juan de Grijalva, in 1518.

“ My palace is now a house of prayer and sober life ; he would turn it into a place of revelry.”

All the ancients but the one laughed at the irony ; that one repeated his words.

“ A friend ; but how ? ” asked Montezuma.

“ Call him from the Cû to the palace ; let him stand here with us ; in the councils give him a voice. He can read the future ; make of him an oracle. O king, who like him can stand between you and Quetzal’ ? ”

For a while Montezuma toyed idly with the *xicara*. He also believed in the prophetic gifts of Mualox, and it was not the first time he had pondered the question of how the holy man had learned the coming of the strangers ; to satisfy himself as to his means of information, he had even instituted inquiries outside the palace. And yet it was but one of several mysteries ; behind it, if not superior, were the golden chamber, its wealth, and the writing on the walls. They were not to be attributed to the paba : works so wondrous could not have been done in one lifetime. They were the handiwork of a god, who had chosen Mualox for his servant and prophet ; such was the judgment of the king.

Nor was that all. The monarch had come to believe that the strangers on the coast were Quetzal’ and his followers, whom it were vain to resist, if their object was vengeance. But the human heart is seldom without its suggestion of hope ; and he thought, though resistance was impossible, might he not propitiate ? This policy had

occupied his thoughts, and most likely without result, for the words of the councilor seemed welcome. Indeed, he could scarcely fail to recognize the bold idea they conveyed, — nothing less, in fact, than meeting the god with his own prophet.

“Very well,” he said in his heart. “I will use the paba. He shall come and stand between me and the woe.”

Then he arose, took a string of pearls from his neck, and with his own hand placed it around that of the ancient.

“Your place is with me, uncle. I will have a chamber fitted for you here in the palace. Go no more away. Ho, steward! The supper is done; let the pipes be brought, and give me music and dance. Bid the minstrels come. A song of the olden time may make me strong again.”





II

A TEZCUCAN LOVER



RACES of the supper speedily disappeared. The screen was rolled away, and pipes placed in the monarch's hand for distribution amongst his familiars. Blue vapor began to ascend to the carved rafters, when the tapestry on both sides of the room was flung aside, and the sound of cornets and flutes poured

in from an adjoining apartment ; and, as if answering the summons of the music, a company of dancing-girls entered, and filled the space in front of the monarch ; half nude were they, and flashing with ornaments, and aerial with gauze and flying ribbons ; silver bells tinkled with each step, and on their heads were wreaths, and in their hands garlands of flowers. Voluptuous children were they of the voluptuous valley.

Saluting the monarch, they glided away, and commenced a dance. With dreamy, half-shut eyes, through the scented cloud momentarily deepening around him, he watched them ; and in the sensuous, animated scene was disclosed one of the enchantments that had weaned him from the martial love of his youth.

Every movement of the figure had been carefully studied, and a kind of æsthetic philosophy was blent with its perfect time and elegance of motion. Slow and stately at first, it gradually quickened ; then, as if to excite the blood and fancy, it became more mazy and voluptuous ; and finally, as that is the sweetest song that ends with a long decadence, it was so concluded as to soothe the transports itself had awakened. Sweeping along, it reached a point, a very climax of abandon and beauty, in which the dancers appeared to forget the music and the method of the figure ; then the eyes of the king shone brightly, and the pipe lingered on his lips forgotten ; and then the musicians began, one by one, to withdraw from the harmony, and the dancers to van-

ish singly from the room, until, at last, there was but one flute to be heard, while but one girl remained. Finally, she also disappeared, and all grew still again.

And the king sat silent and listless, surrendered to the enjoyment which was the object of the diversion; yet he heard the music; yet he saw the lithe and palpitating forms of the dancers in posture and motion; yet he felt the sweet influence of their youth and grace and beauty, not as a passion, but rather a spell full of the suggestions of passion, when a number of men came noiselessly in, and, kneeling, saluted him. Their costume was that of priests, and each of them carried an instrument of music fashioned somewhat like a Hebrew lyre.

“Ah, my minstrels, my minstrels!” he said, his face flushing with pleasure. “Welcome in the streets, welcome in the camp, welcome in the palace, also! What have you to-night?”

“When last we were admitted to your presence, O king, you bade us compose hymns to the god Quetzal’” —

“Yes; I remember.”

“We pray you not to think ill of your slaves if we say that the verses which come unbidden are the best; no song of the bird’s so beautiful as the one it sings when its heart is full.”

The monarch sat up.

“Nay, I did not command. I know something of the spirit of poetry. It is not a thing to be driven by the will, like a canoe by a strong arm;

neither is it a slave, to come or go at a signal. I bid my warriors march ; I order the sacrifice ; but the lays of my minstrels have ever been of their free will. Leave me now. To you are my gardens and palaces. I warrant the verses you have are good ; but go ask your hearts for better."

They retired with their faces toward him until hidden behind the tapestry.

"I love a song, uncles," continued the king ; "I love a hymn to the gods, and a story of battle chanted in a deep voice. In the halls of the Sun every soul is a minstrel, and every tale a song. But let them go ; it is well enough. I promised Itzli', the Tezcucan, to give him audience to-night. He comes to the palace but seldom, and he has not asked a favor since I settled his quarrel with the lord Cacama. Send one to see if he is now at the door."

Thereupon he fell to reflecting and smoking ; and when next he spoke, it was from the midst of an aromatic cloud.

"I loved the wise 'Hualpilli ; for his sake, I would have his children happy. He was a lover of peace, and gave more to policy than to war. It were grievous to let his city be disturbed by feuds and fighting men ; therefore I gave it to the eldest son. His claim was best ; and, besides, he has the friendly heart to serve me. Still — still, I wish there had been two Tezcucos."

"There was but one voice about the judgment in Tezcucan, O king ; the citizens all said it was just."

“And they would have said the same if I had given them Iztlil’. I know the knaves, uncle. It was not their applause I cared for ; but, you see, in gaining a servant, I lost one. Iztlil’ is a warrior. Had he the will, he could serve me in the field as well as his brother in the council. I must attach him to me. A strong arm is pleasant to lean on ; it is better than a staff.”

Addressing himself to the pipe again, he sat smoking, and moodily observing the vapor vanish above him. There was silence until Iztlil’ was ushered in.

The cacique was still suffering from his wounds. His step was feeble, so that his obeisance was stopped by the monarch himself.

“Let the salutation go, my lord Iztlil’. Your courage has cost you much. I remember you are the son of my old friend, and bid you welcome.”

“The Tlascalans are good warriors,” said the Tezcucan coldly.

“And for that reason better victims,” added the king quickly. “By the Sun, I know not what we would do without them. Their hills supply our temples.”

“And I, good king — I am but a warrior. My heart is not softened by things pertaining to religion. Enough for me to worship the gods.”

“Then you are not a student ? ”

“I never studied in the academies.”

“I understand,” said the king, with a low laugh. “You cannot name as many stars as enemies whom you have slain. No matter. I have places

for such scholars. Have you commanded an army?"

"It pleased you to give me that confidence. I led my companies within the Tlascalan wall, and came back with captives."

"I recollect now. But as most good warriors are modest, my son, I will not tell you what the chiefs said of your conduct; you would blush" — Iztlil' started.

"Content you, content you; your blush would not be for shame."

There was a pause, which the king gave to his pipe. Suddenly he said, "There have been tongues busy with your fame, my son. I have heard you were greatly dissatisfied because I gave your father's city to your elder brother. But I consider that men are never without detractors, and I cannot forget that you have periled your life for the gods. Actions I accept as the proofs of will. If the favor that brought you here be reasonable, it is yours for the asking. I have the wish to serve you."

"I am not surprised that I have enemies," said Iztlil' calmly. "I will abuse no one on that account; for I am an enemy, and can forgive in others what I deem virtue in myself. But it moves me greatly, O king, that my enemies should steal into your palace, and, in my absence, wrong me in your opinion. But pardon me; I did not come to defend myself" —

"You have taken my words in an evil sense," interposed the king, with an impatient gesture.

“Or to conceal the truth,” the Tezcucan continued. “There is kingly blood in me, and I dare speak as my father’s son. So if they said merely that I was dissatisfied with your judgment, they said truly.”

Montezuma frowned.

“I intend my words to be respectful, most mighty king. A common wisdom teaches us to respect the brave man and dread the coward. And there is not in your garden a flower as beautiful, nor in your power a privilege as precious, as free speech; and it would sound ill of one so great and secure as my father’s friend if he permitted in the streets and in the farmer’s hut what he forbade in his palace. I spoke of dissatisfaction; but think not it was because you gave Tezcuco to my brother, and to me the bare hills that have scarcely herbage enough for a wolf-covert. I am less a prince than a warrior; all places are alike to me; the earth affords me royal slumber, while no jeweled canopy is equal to the starred heavens; and as there is a weakness in pleasant memories, I have none. To such as I am, O king, what matters a barren hill or a proud palace? I murmured, nay, I did more, because, in judging my quarrel, you overthrew the independence of my country. When my father visited you from across the lake, he was not accustomed to stand before you, or hide his kingly robes beneath a slave’s garb.”

Montezuma half started from his seat. “Holy gods! Is rebellion so bold?”

"I meant no disrespect, great king. I only sought to justify myself, and in your royal presence say what I have thought while fighting under your banner. But, without more abuse of your patience, I will to my purpose, especially as I came for peace and friendship."

"The son of my friend forgets that I have ways to make peace without treating for it," said the king.

The Tezcucan smothered an angry reply.

"By service done I have shown a disposition to serve you, O king. Very soon every warrior will be needed. A throne may be laid amid hymns and priestly prayers, yet have no strength; to endure, it must rest upon the allegiance of love. Though I have spoken unpleasant words, I came to ask that, by a simple boon, you give me cause to love. I have reflected that I, too, am of royal blood, and, as the son of a king, may lead your armies, and look for alliance in your house. By marriage, O king, I desire, come good or evil, to link my fortune to yours."

Montezuma's countenance was stolid; no eye could have detected upon it so much as surprise. He quietly asked, "Which of my daughters has found favor in your eyes?"

"They are all beautiful, but only one of them is fitted for a warrior's wife."

"Tula?"

Iztlil' bowed.

"She is dear to me," said the king softly, "dearer than a city; she is holy as a temple, and

lovelier than the morning ; her voice is sweet as the summer wind, and her presence as the summer itself. Have you spoken to her of this thing? ”

“ I love her, so that her love is nothing to me. Her feelings are her own, but she is yours ; and you are more powerful to give than she to withhold.”

“ Well, well,” said the monarch, after a little thought ; “ in my realm there are none of better quality than the children of 'Hualpilli,—none from whom such demand is as proper. Yet it is worthy deliberation. It is true, I have the power to bestow, but there are others who have the right to be consulted. I study the happiness of my people, and it were unnatural if I cared less for that of my children. So leave me now, but take with you, brave prince, the assurance that I am friendly to your suit. The gods go with you ! ”

And Iztzil', after a low obeisance, withdrew ; and then the overture was fully discussed. Montezuma spoke freely, welcoming the opportunity of securing the bold, free-spoken cacique, and seeing in the demand only a question of policy. As might be expected, the ancients made no opposition ; they could see no danger in the alliance, and had no care for the parties. It was policy.



III

THE BANISHMENT OF GUATAMOZIN



HE palace of Montezuma was regarded as of very great sanctity, so that his household, its economy, and the exact relation its members bore to each other were mysteries to the public. From the best information, however, it would seem that he had two lawful and acknowledged wives, the queens Tecalco and Acatlan,¹ who,

¹ These are the proper names of the queens. MSS. of Muñoz. Also, note to Prescott, *Công. of Mexico*, vol. ii. p. 351.

with their families, occupied spacious apartments secure from intrusion. They were good-looking, middle-aged women, whom the monarch honored with the highest respect and confidence. By the first one, he had a son and a daughter; by the second, two daughters.

“Help me, Acatlan! I appeal to your friendship, to the love you bear your children, — help me in my trouble.” So the queen Tecalco prayed the queen Acatlan in the palace the morning after the audience given the Tezcucan by the king.

The two were sitting in a room furnished with some taste. Through the great windows, shaded by purple curtains, streamed the fresh breath of the early day. There were female slaves around them in waiting; while a boy nearly grown, at the eastern end of the apartment, was pitching the golden balls in *totoloque*. This was prince Io', the brother of Tula, and son of Tecalco.

“What is the trouble? What can I do?” asked Acatlan.

“Listen to me,” said Tecalco. “The king has just gone. He came in better mood than usual, and talked pleasantly. Something had happened; some point of policy had been gained. Nowadays, you know, he talks and thinks of nothing but policy; formerly it was all of war. We cannot deny, Acatlan, that he is much changed. Well, he played a game with Io', then sat down, saying he had news which he thought would please me. You will hardly believe it, but he said that Iztlil', the proud Tezcucan, asked Tula in marriage last

night. Think of it! Tula, my blossom, my soul! and to that vile cacique!"

"Well, he is brave, and the son of 'Hualpilli," said Acatlan.

"What! You!" said Tecalco despairingly. "Do you, too, turn against me? I do not like him, and would not if he were the son of a god. Tula hates him!"

"I will not turn against you, Tecalco. Be calmer, and tell me what more the king said."

"I told him I was surprised, but not glad to hear the news. He frowned, and paced the floor, now here, now there. I was frightened, but could bear his anger better than the idea of my Tula, so good, so beautiful, the wife of the base Tezucan. He said the marriage must go on; it was required by policy, and would help quiet the Empire, which was never so threatened. You will hardly believe I ventured to tell him that it should not be, as Tula was already contracted to Guatamozin. I supposed that announcement would quiet the matter, but it only enraged him; he spoke bitterly of the 'tzin. I could scarcely believe my ears. He used to love him. What has happened to change his feeling?"

Acatlan thrummed her pretty mouth with her fingers, and thought awhile.

"Yes, I have heard some stories about the 'tzin" —

"Indeed!" said Tecalco, opening her eyes.

"He too has changed, as you may have observed," continued Acatlan. "He used to be

gay and talkative, fond of company, and dance; latterly, he stays at home, and when abroad, mopes, and is silent; while we all know that no great private or public misfortune has happened him. The king appears to have noticed it. And, my dear sister," — the queen lowered her voice to a confidential whisper, — "they say the 'tzin aspires to the throne."

"What! Do you believe it? Does the king?" cried Tecalco, more in anger than surprise.

"I believe nothing yet, though there are some grounds for his accusers to go upon. They say he entertains at his palace near Iztapalapan none but men of the army, and that while in Tenochtitlan, he studies the favor of the people, and uses his wealth to win popularity with all classes. Indeed, Tecalco, somehow the king learned that, on the day of the celebration of Quetzal', the 'tzin was engaged in a direct conspiracy against him."

"It is false, Acatlan, it is false! The king has not a more faithful subject. I know the 'tzin. He is worth a thousand of the Tezcucan, who is himself the traitor." And the vexed queen beat the floor with her sandaled foot.

"As to that, Tecalco, I know nothing. But what more from the king?"

"He told me that Tula should never marry the 'tzin; he would use all his power against it; he would banish him from the city first. And his rage increased until, finally, he swore by the gods he would order a banquet, and, in presence of all the lords of the Empire, publicly betroth Tula

and the Tezcucan. He said he would do anything the safety of the throne and the gods required of him. He never was so angry. And that, O Acatlan, my sister, that is my trouble. How can I save my child from such a horrid betrothal?"

Acatlan shook her head gloomily. "The king brooks defeat better than opposition. We would not be safe to do anything openly. I acknowledge myself afraid, and unable to advise you."

Tecalco burst into tears, and wrung her hands, overcome by fear and rage. Io' then left his game, and came to her. He was not handsome, being too large for his years, and ungraceful; this tendency to homeliness was increased by the smallness of his face and head; the features were actually childish.

"Say no more, mother," he said, tears standing in his eyes, as if to prove his sympathy and kindness. "You know it would be better to play with the tigers than stir the king to anger."

"Ah, Io', what shall I do? I always heard you speak well of the 'tzin. You loved him once."

"And I love him yet."

Tecalco was less pacified than ever.

"What would I not give to know who set the king so against him! Upon the traitor be the harm there is in a mother's curse! If my child must be sacrificed, let it be by a priest, and as a victim to the gods."

"Do not speak so. Be wise, Tecalco. Recollect such sorrows belong to our rank."

“Our rank, Acatlan! I can forget it sooner than that I am a mother! Oh, you do not know how long I have nursed the idea of wedding Tula to the 'tzin! Since their childhood I have prayed, plotted, and hoped for it. With what pride I have seen them grow up, — he so brave, generous, and princely, she so staid and beautiful! I have never allowed her to think of other destiny: the gods made them for each other.”

“Mother,” said Io' thoughtfully, “I have heard you say that Guatamozin was wise. Why not send him word of what has happened, and put our trust in him?”

The poor queen caught at the suggestion eagerly; for with a promise of aid, at the same time it relieved her of responsibility, of all burthens the most dreadful to a woman. And Acatlan, really desirous of helping her friend, but at a loss for a plan, and terrified by the idea of the monarch's wrath incurred, wondered they had not thought of the proposal sooner, and urged the 'tzin's right to be informed of the occurrence.

“There must be secrecy, Tecalco. The king must never know us as traitors: that would be our ruin.”

“There shall be no danger; I can go myself,” said Io'. “It is long since I was at Iztapalapan, and they say the 'tzin has such beautiful gardens. I want to see the three kings who hold torches in his hall; I want to try a bow with him.”

After some entreaty, Tecalco assented. She required him, however, to put on a costume less

likely to attract attention, and take some other than a royal canoe across the lake. Half an hour later, he passed out of a garden gate, and, by a circuitous route, hurried to the canal in which lay the vessels of the Iztapalapan watermen. He found one, and was bargaining with its owner, when a young man walked briskly up, and stepped into a canoe close by. Something in the gay dress of the stranger made Io' look at him a second time, and he was hardly less pleased than surprised at being addressed, —

“Ho, friend! I am going to your city. Save your cocoa, and go with me.”

Io' was confused.

“Come on!” the stranger persisted, with a pleasant smile. “Come on! I want company. You were never so welcome.”

The smile decided the boy. He set one foot in the vessel, but instantly retreated — an ocelot, crouched in the bottom, raised its round head, and stared fixedly at him. The stranger laughed, and reassured him, after which he walked boldly forward. Then the canoe swung from its mooring, and in a few minutes, under the impulsion of three strong slaves, went flying down the canal. Under bridges, through incoming flotillas, and past the great houses on either hand they darted, until the city was left behind, and the lake, colored with the borrowed blue of the sky, spread out rich and billowy before them. The eyes of the stranger brightened at the prospect.

“I like this. By Our Mother I like it!” he

said earnestly. "We have lakes in Tihuanco on which I have spent days riding waves and spearing fish; but they were dull to this. See the stretch of the water! Look yonder at the villages, and here at the city and Chapultepec! Ah, that you were born in Tenochtitlan be proud. There is no grander birthplace this side of the Sun!"

"I am an Aztec," said Io', moved by the words.

The other smiled, and added, "Why not go further, and say, 'and son of the king.'"

Io' was startled.

"Surprised! Good prince, I am a hunter. From habit, I observe everything; a track, a tree, a place, once seen is never forgotten; and since I came to the city, the night before the combat of Quetzal', the habit has not left me. That day you were seated under the red canopy, with the princesses Tula and Nenetzin. So I came to know the king's son."

"Then you saw the combat?"

"And how brave it was! There never was its match, — never such archery as the 'tzin's. Then the blow with which he killed the Othmi! I only regretted that the Tezcucan escaped. I do not like him; he is envious and spiteful; it would have been better had he fallen instead of the Otompan. You know Iztzil'?"

"Not to love him," said Io'.

"Is he like the 'tzin?"

"Not at all."

"So I have heard," said the hunter, shrugging his shoulders. "But — Down, fellow!" he cried

to the ocelot, whose approaches discomposed the prince. "I was going to say," he resumed, with a look which, as an invitation to confidence, was irresistible, "that there is no reason why you and I should not be friends. We are both going to see the 'tzin" —

Io' was again much confused.

"I only heard you say so to the waterman on the landing. If your visit, good prince, was intended as a secret, you are a careless messenger. But have no fear. I intend entering the 'tzin's service; that is, if he will take me."

"Is the 'tzin enlisting men?" asked Io'.

"No. I am merely weary of hunting. My father is a good merchant whose trading life is too tame for me. I love excitement. Even hunting deer and chasing wolves are too tame. I will now try war, and there is but one whom I care to follow. Together we will see and talk to him."

"You speak as if you were used to arms."

"My skill may be counted nothing. I seek the service more from what I imagine it to be. The march, the camp, the battle, the taking captives, the periling life, when it is but a secondary object, as it must be with every warrior of true ambition, all have charms for my fancy. Besides, I am discontented with my condition. I want honor, rank, and command, — wealth I have. Hence, for me, the army is the surest road. Beset with trials and needing a good heart and arm, yet it travels upward, upward, and that is all I seek to know."

The *naïveté* and enthusiasm of the hunter were

new and charming to the prince, who was impelled to study him once more. He noticed how exactly the arms were rounded; that the neck was long, muscular, and widened at the base, like the trunk of an oak; that the features, excited by the passing feeling, were noble and good; that the very carriage of the head was significant of aptitude for brave things, if not command. Could the better gods have thrown Io' in such company for self-comparison? Was that the time they had chosen to wake within him the longings of mind natural to coming manhood? He felt the inspiration of an idea new to him. All his life had been passed in the splendid monotony of his father's palace; he had been permitted merely to hear of war, and that from a distance; of the noble passion for arms he knew nothing. Accustomed to childish wants, with authority to gratify them, ambition for power had not yet disturbed him. But, as he listened, it was given him to see the emptiness of his past life, and understand the advantages he already possessed; he said to himself, "Am I not master of grade and opportunities, so coveted by this unknown hunter, and so far above his reach?" In that moment the contentment which had canopied his existence, like a calm sky, full of stars and silence and peace, was taken up, and whirled away; his spirit strengthened with a rising ambition and a courage royally descended.

"You are going to study with the 'tzin. I would like to be your comrade," he said.

“I accept you, I give you my heart!” replied the hunter, with beaming face. “We will march, and sleep, and fight, and practice together. I will be true to you as shield to the warrior. Hereafter, O prince, when you would speak of me, call me Hualpa; and if you would make me happy, say of me, ‘He is my comrade’!”

The sun stood high in the heavens when they reached the landing. Mounting a few steps that led from the water’s edge, they found themselves in a garden rich with flowers, beautiful trees, running streams, and trellised summer-houses, — the garden of a prince, — of Guatamozin, the true hero of his country.





IV

GUATAMOZIN AT HOME



GUATAMOZIN inherited a great fortune, ducal rank, and an estate near Iztapalapan. Outside the city, midst a garden that extended for miles around, stood his palace, built in the prevalent style, one story high, but broad and wide enough to comfortably accommodate several thousand men. His retainers, a legion in them-

selves, inhabited it for the most part ; and whether soldier, artisan, or farmer, each had his quarters, his exclusive possession as against every one but the 'tzin.

The garden was almost entirely devoted to the cultivation of fruits and flowers. Hundreds of slaves, toiling there constantly under tasteful supervision, made and kept it beautiful past description. Rivulets of pure water, spanned by bridges and bordered with flowers, ran through every part over beds of sand yellow as gold. The paths frequently led to artificial lagoons, delightful for the coolness that lingered about them, when the sun looked with his burning eye down upon the valley ; for they were fringed with willow and sycamore trees, all clad with vines as with garments ; and some were further garnished with little islands, plumed with palms, and made attractive by kiosks. Nor were these all. Fountains and cascades filled the air with sleepy songs ; orange-groves rose up, testifying to the clime they adorned ; and in every path small *teules*, on pedestals of stone, so mingled religion with the loveliness that there could be no admiration without worship.

Io' and Hualpa, marveling at the beauty they beheld, pursued a path, strewn with white sand, and leading across the garden, to the palace. A few armed men loitered about the portal, but allowed them to approach without question. From the antechamber they sent their names to the 'tzin, and directly the slave returned with word to Io' to follow him.

The study into which the prince was presently shown was furnished with severe plainness. An arm-chair, if such it may be called, some rude tables and uncushioned benches, offered small encouragement to idleness.

Sand, glittering like crushed crystal, covered the floor, and, instead of tapestry, the walls were hung with maps of the Empire, and provinces the most distant. Several piles of MSS., — the books of the Aztecs, — with parchment and writing-materials, lay on a table; and half concealed amongst them was a harp, such as we have seen in the hands of the royal minstrels.

“Welcome, Io’, welcome!” said the ’tzin, in his full voice. “You have come at length, after so many promises, — come last of all my friends. When you were here before, you were a child, and I a boy like you now. Let us go and talk it over.” And leading him to a bench by a window, they sat down.

“I remember the visit,” said Io’. “It was many years ago. You were studying then, and I find you studying yet.”

A serious thought rose to the ’tzin’s mind, and his smile was clouded.

“You do not understand me, Io’. Shut up in your father’s palace, your life is passing too dreamily. The days with you are like waves of the lake: one rolls up, and, scarcely murmuring, breaks on the shore; another succeeds, — that is all. Hear, and believe me. He who would be wise must study. There are many who live for

themselves, a few who live for their race. Of the first class, no thought is required; they eat, sleep, are merry, and die, and have no hall in heaven: but the second must think, toil, and be patient; they must know, and, if possible, know everything. God and ourselves are the only sources of knowledge. I would not have you despise humanity, but all that is from ourselves is soon learned. There is but one inexhaustible fountain of intelligence, and that is Nature, the God Supreme. See those volumes; they are of men, full of wisdom, but nothing original; they are borrowed from the book of deity, — the always-opened book, of which the sky is one chapter, and earth the other. Very deep are the lessons of life and heaven there taught. I confess to you, Io', that I aspire to be of those whose lives are void of selfishness, who live for others, for their country. Your father's servant, I would serve him understandingly; to do so, I must be wise; and I cannot be wise without patient study."

Io's unpracticed mind but half understood the philosophy to which he listened; but when the 'tzin called himself his father's servant, Acatlan's words recurred to the boy.

"O 'tzin," he said, "they are not all like you, so good, so true. There have been some telling strange stories about you to the king."

"About me?"

"They say you want to be king," — the listener's face was passive, — "and that on Quetzal's day you were looking for opportunity to attack

my father." Still there was no sign of emotion. "Your staying at home, they say, is but a pretense to cover your designs."

"And what more, Io'?"

"They say you are taking soldiers into your pay; that you give money, and practice all manner of arts, to become popular in Tenochtitlan; and that your delay in entering the arena on the day of the combat had something to do with your conspiracy."

For a moment the noble countenance of the 'tzin was disturbed.

"A lying catalogue! But is that all?"

"No," — and Io's voice trembled, — "I am a secret messenger from the queen Tecalco, my mother. She bade me say to you, that last night Iztlil', the Tezcucan, had audience with the king, and asked Tula for his wife."

Guatamozin sprang from his seat more pallid than ever in battle.

"And what said Montezuma?"

"This morning he came to the queen, my mother, and told her about it; on your account she objected; but he became angry, spoke harshly of you, and swore Tula should not wed with you; he would banish you first."

Through the silent cell the 'tzin strode gloomily; the blow weakened him. Mualox was wrong; men cannot make themselves almost gods; by having many ills, and bearing them bravely, they can only become heroes. After a long struggle he resumed his calmness and seat.

“What more from the queen?”

“Only, that as she was helpless, she left everything to you. She dares not oppose the king.”

“I understand!” exclaimed the 'tzin, starting from the bench again. “The Tezcucan is my enemy. Crossing the lake, night before the combat, he told me he loved Tula, and charged me with designs against the Empire, and cursed the king and his crown. Next day he fought under my challenge. The malice of a mean soul cannot be allayed by kindness. But for me the *tamanes* would have buried him with the Tlascalans. I sent him to my house; my slaves tended him; yet his hate was only sharpened.”

He paced the floor to and fro, speaking vehemently.

“The ingrate, charges me with aspiring to the throne. Judge me, holy gods! Judge how willingly I would lay down my life to keep the crown where it is! He says my palace has been open to men of the army. It was always so, — I am a warrior. I have consulted them about the Empire, but always as a subject, never for its ill. Such charges I laugh at; but that I sought to slay the king is too horrible for endurance. On the day of the combat, about the time of the assemblage, I went to the Cû of Quetzal' for blessing. I saw no smoke or other sign of fire upon the tower. Mualox was gone, and I trembled lest the fire should be dead. I climbed up, and found only a few living embers. There were no fagots on the roof, nor in the courtyard; the

shrine was abandoned, Mualox old. The desolation appealed to me. The god seemed to claim my service. I broke my spear and shield, and flung the fragments into the urn, then hastened to the palace, loaded some *tamanes* with wood, and went back to the Cû. I was not too late there; but, hurrying to the *tianguetz*, I found myself almost dishonored. So was I kept from the arena; that service to the god is now helping my enemy as proof that I was waiting on a house-top to murder my king and kinsman! Alas! I have only slaves to bear witness to the holy work that kept me on the temple. Much I fear the gods are making the king blind for his ruin and the ruin of us all. He believes the strangers on the coast are from the Sun, when they are but men. Instead of war against them, he is thinking of embassies and presents. Now, more than ever, he needs the support of friends; but he divides his family against itself, and confers favors on enemies. I see the danger. Unfriendly gods are moving against us, not in the strangers but in our own divisions. Remember the prophecy of Mualox, 'The race of Azatlan is ended forever.'"

The speaker stopped his walking, and his voice became low and tremulous.

"Yet I love him; he has been kind; he gave me command; through his graciousness I have dwelt unmolested in this palace of my father. I am bound to him by love and law. As he has been my friend, I will be his; when his peril is greatest, I will be truest. Nothing but ill from

him to Anahuac can make me his enemy. So, so, — let it pass. I trust the future to the gods."

Then, as if seeking to rid himself of the bitter subject, he turned to Io'. "Did not some one come with you?"

The boy told what he knew of Hualpa.

"I take him to be no common fellow; he has some proud ideas. I think you would like him."

"I will try your hunter, Io'. And if he is what you say of him, I will accept his service."

And they went immediately to the antechamber, where Hualpa saluted the 'tzin. The latter surveyed his fine person approvingly, and said, "I am told you wish to enter my service. Were you ever in battle?"

The hunter told his story with his wonted modesty.

"Well, the chase is a good school for warriors. It trains the thews, teaches patience and endurance, and sharpens the spirit's edge. Let us to the garden. A hand to retain skill must continue its practice; like a good memory, it is the better for exercise. Come, and I will show you how I keep prepared for every emergency of combat." And so saying, the 'tzin led the visitors out.

They went to the garden, followed by the retainers lounging at the door. A short walk brought them to a space surrounded by a copse of orange-trees, strewn with sand, and broad enough for a mock battle; a few benches about the margin afforded accommodation to specta-

tors; a stone house at the northern end served for armory, and was full of arms and armor. A glance assured the visitors that the place had been prepared expressly for training. Some score or more of warriors, in the military livery of the 'tzin, already occupied a portion of the field. Upon his appearance they quitted their games, and closed around him with respectful salutations.

"How now, my good Chinantlan!" he said, pleasantly. "Did I not award you a prize yesterday? There are few in the valley who can excel you in launching the spear."

"The plume is mine no longer," replied the warrior. "I was beaten last night. The winner, however, is a countryman."

"A countryman! You Chinantlans seem born to the spear. Where is the man?"

The victor stepped forward, and drew up before the master, who regarded his brawny limbs, sinewy neck, and bold eyes with undisguised admiration; so an artist would regard a picture or a statue. Above the fellow's helm floated a plume of scarlet feathers, the trophy of his superior skill.

"Get your spear," said the 'tzin. "I bring you a competitor."

The spear was brought, an ugly weapon in any hand. The head was of copper, and the shaft sixteen feet long. The rough Chinantlan handled it with a loving grip.

"Have you such in Tihuanco?" asked Guatamozin.

Hualpa balanced the weapon and laughed.

"We have only javelins, — mere reeds to this. Unless to hold an enemy at bay, I hardly know its use. Certainly, it is not for casting."

"Set the mark, men. We will give the stranger a lesson. Set it to the farthest throw."

A pine picket was then set up a hundred feet away, presenting a target of the height and breadth of a man, to which a shield was bolted breast-high from the sand.

"Now give the Chinantlan room!"

The wearer of the plume took his place; advancing one foot, he lifted the spear above his head with the right hand, poised it a moment, then hurled it from him, and struck the picket a palm's breadth below the shield.

"Out, out!" cried the 'tzin. "Bring me the spear; I have a mind to wear the plume myself."

When it was brought him, he cast it lightly as a child would toss a weed; yet the point drove clanging through the brazen base of the shield, and into the picket behind. Amid the applause of the sturdy warriors he said to Hualpa, —

"Get ready; the hunter must do something for the honor of his native hills."

"I cannot use a spear in competition with Guatamozin," said Hualpa, with brightening eyes; "but if he will have brought a javelin, a good comely weapon, I will show him my practice."

A slender-shafted missile, about half the length of the spear, was produced from the armory, and examined carefully.



“See, good 'tzin, it is not true. Let me have another.”

The next one was to his satisfaction.

“Now,” he said, “set the target thrice a hundred feet away. If the dainty living of Xoli have not weakened my arm, I will at least strike you shield.”

The bystanders looked at each other wonderingly, and the 'tzin was pleased. He had not lost a word or a motion of Hualpa's. The feat undertaken was difficult and but seldom achieved successfully; but the aspirant was confident, and he manifested the will to which all achievable things are possible.

The target was reset, and the Tihuanacan took the stand. Resting the shaft on the palm of his left hand, he placed the fingers of his right against the butt, and drew the graceful weapon arm-length backward. It described an arc in the air, and to the astonishment of all fell in the shield a little left of the centre.

“Tell me, Hualpa,” said Guatamozin, “are there more hunters in Tihuanco who can do such a deed? I will have you bring them to me.”

The Tihuanacan lowered his eyes. “I grieve to say, good 'tzin, that I know of none. I excelled them all. But I can promise that in my native province there are hundreds braver than I, ready to serve you to the death.”

“Well, it is enough. I intended to try you further and with other weapons, but not now. He who can so wield a javelin must know to

bend a bow and strike with a *maquahuitl*. I accept your service. Let us to the palace."

Hualpa thrilled with delight. Already he felt himself in the warrior's path, with a glory won. All his dreams were about to be realized. In respectful silence he followed Guatamozin, and as they reached the portal steps, Io' touched his arm.

"Remember our compact on the lake," he whispered.

The hunter put his arm lovingly about the prince, and so they entered the house. And that day Fate wove a brotherhood of three hearts which was broken only by death.





V

NIGHT AT THE CHALCAN'S



HE same day, in the evening, Xoli lay on a lounge by the fountain under his portico. His position gave him the range of the rooms, which glowed like day, and resounded with life. He could even distinguish the occupations of some of his guests. In fair view a group was listening to a minstrel; beyond them he occasionally caught sight of girls dancing; and every moment peals of laughter floated out from the chambers of play. A number of persons, whose arms and attire published them of the nobler class, sat around the Chalcan in the screen of the curtains, conversing, or listlessly gazing out on the square.

Gradually Xoli's reverie became more dreamy; sleep stole upon his senses, and shut out the lullaby of the fountain, and drowned the influence of his *cuisine*. His patrons after a while disap-

peared, and the watchers on the temples told the passing time without awakening him. Very happy was the Chalcan.

The slumber was yet strong upon him, when an old man and a girl came to the portico. The former, decrepit and ragged, seated himself on the step. Scanty hair hung in white locks over his face; and grasping a staff, he rested his head wearily upon his hands, and talked to himself.

The girl approached the Chalcan with the muffled tread of fear. She was clad in the usual dress of her class,— a white chemise, with several skirts short and embroidered, over which, after being crossed at the throat, a red scarf dropped its tasseled ends nearly to her heels. The neatness of the garments more than offset their cheapness. Above her forehead, in the fillet that held the mass of black hair off her face, leaving it fully exposed, there was the gleam of a common jewel; otherwise she was without ornament. In all beauty there is — nay, must be — an idea; so that a countenance to be handsome even, must in some way at sight quicken a sentiment or stir a memory in the beholder. It was so here. To look at the old man's guardian was to know that she had a sorrow to tell, and to pity her before it was told; to be sure that under her tremulous anxiety there was a darksome story and an extraordinary purpose, the signs of which, too fine for the materialism of words, but plain to the sympathetic inner consciousness, lurked in the

corners of her mouth, looked from her great black eyes, and blent with every action.

Gliding over the marble, she stopped behind the sleeper, and spoke, without awakening him; her voice was too like the murmur of the fountain. Frightened at the words, low as they were, she hesitated; but a look at the old man reassured her, and she called again. Xoli started.

"How now, mistress!" he said angrily, reaching for her hand.

"I want to see Xoli, the Chalcan," she replied, escaping his touch.

"What have you to do with him?"

He sat up, and looked at her in wonder.

"What have you to do with him?" he repeated in a kindlier tone.

Her face kindled with a sudden intelligence. "Xoli! The gods be praised! And their blessing on you, if you will do a kind deed for a countryman!"

"Well! But what beggar is that? Came he with you?"

"It is of him I would speak. Hear me!" she asked, drawing near him again. "He is poor, but a Chalcan. If you have memory of the city of your birth, be merciful to his child."

"His child! Who? Nay, it is a beggar's tale! Ho, fellow! How many times have I driven you away already! How dare you return!"

Slowly the old man raised his head from his staff, and turned his face to the speaker; there was no light there: he was blind!

"By the holy fires, no trick this! Say on, girl. He is a Chalcan, you said."

"A countryman of yours,"—and her tears fell fast. "A hut is standing where the causeway leads from Chalco to Iztapalapan; it is my father's. He was happy under its roof; for, though blind and poor, he could hear my mother's voice, which was the kindest thing on earth to him. But Our Mother called her on the coming of a bright morning, and since then he has asked for bread, when I had not a *tuna*¹ to give him. O Xoli! did you but know what it is to ask for bread, when there is none! I am his child, and can think of but one way to quiet his cry." And she paused, looking in his face for encouragement.

"Tell me your name, girl; tell me your name, then go on," he said, with a trembling lip, for his soul was clever.

At that instant the old man moaned querulously, "Yeteve, Yeteve!"

She went, and clasped his neck, and spoke to him soothingly. Xoli's eyes became humid; down in the depths of his heart an emotion grew strangely warm.

"Yeteve, Yeteve!" he repeated musingly, thinking the syllables soft and pretty. "Come; stand here again, Yeteve," said he aloud, when the dotard was pacified. "He wants bread, you say: how would you supply him?"

"You are rich. You want many slaves; and the law permits the poor to sell themselves."² I

¹ A species of fig.

² Prescott, *Conq. of Mexico*.

would be your slave, — asking no price, except that you give the beggar bread.”

“A slave! Sell yourself!” he cried in dismay. “A slave! Why, you are beautiful, Yeteve, and have not bethought yourself that some day the gods may want you for a victim.”

She was silent.

“What can you do? Dance? Sing? Can you weave soft veils and embroider golden flowers, like ladies in the palaces? If you can, no slave in Anahuac will be so peerless; the lords will bid more cocoa than you can carry; you will be rich.”

“If so, then can I do all you have said.”

And she ran, and embraced the old man, saying, “Patience, patience! In a little while we will have bread, and be rich. Yes,” she continued, returning to the Chalcan, “they taught me in the *teocallis*, where they would have had me as priestess.”

“It is good to be a priestess, Yeteve; you should have stayed there.”

“But I did so love the little hut by the causeway. And I loved the beggar, and they let me go.”

“And now you wish to sell yourself? I want slaves, but not such as you, Yeteve. I want those who can work, — slaves whom the lash will hurt, but not kill. Besides, you are worth more cocoa than I can spare. Keep back your tears. I will do better than buy you myself. I will sell you, and to-night. Here in my house you shall

dance for the bidders. I know them all. He shall be brave and rich and clever who buys, — clever and brave, and the owner of a palace, full of bread for the beggar, and love for Yeteve.”

Clapping his hands, a slave appeared at the door.

“Take yon beggar, and give him to eat. Lead him, — he is blind. Come, child, follow me.”

He summoned his servants, and bade them publish the sale in every apartment ; then he led the girl to the hall used for the exhibition of his own dancing-girls. It was roomy and finely lighted ; the floor was of polished marble ; a blue drop-curtain extended across the northern end, in front of which were rows of stools, handsomely cushioned, for spectators. Music, measured for the dance, greeted the poor priestess, and had a magical effect upon her ; her eyes brightened, a smile played about her mouth. Never was the chamber of the rich Chalcan graced by a creature fairer or more devoted.

“A priestess of the dance needs no teaching from me,” said Xoli, patting her flushed cheek. “Get ready ; they are coming. Beware of the marble ; and when I clap my hands, begin.”

She looked around the hall once ; not a point escaped her. Springing to the great curtain, and throwing her robe away, she stood before it in her simple attire ; and no studied effect of art could have been more beautiful ; motionless and lovely, against the relief of the blue background, she seemed actually *spirituelle*.

Upon the announcement of the auction, the patrons of the house hurried to the scene. Voluntary renunciation of freedom was common enough among the poorer classes in Tenochtitlan, but a transaction of the kind under the auspices of the rich broker was a novelty; so that curiosity and expectation ran high. The nobles, as they arrived, occupied the space in front of the curtain, or seated themselves, marveling at the expression of her countenance.

The music had not ceased; and the bidders being gathered, Xoli, smiling with satisfaction, stepped forward to give the signal, when an uproar of merriment announced the arrival of a party of the younger dignitaries of the court, — amongst them Iztli', the Tezcucan, and Maxtla, chief of the guard, the former showing signs of quick recovery from his wounds, the latter superbly attired.

“Hold! What have we here?” cried the Tezcucan, surveying the girl. “Has this son of Chalco been robbing the palace?”

“The temples, my lord! Iztli'! He has robbed the temples! By all the gods, it is the priestess Yeteve!” answered Maxtla, amazed. “Say, Chalcan, what does priestess of the Blessed Lady in such unhallowed den?”

The broker explained.

“Good, good!” shouted the new-comers.

“Begin, Xoli! A thousand cocoa for the priestess, — millions of bread for the beggar!” This from Maxtla.

“Only a thousand?” said Iztzil’ scornfully. “Only a thousand? Five thousand to begin with, more after she dances.”

Xoli gave the signal, and the soul of the Chalcan girl broke forth in motion. Dancing had been her *rôle* in the religious rites of the temple; many a time the pabas around the altar, allured by her matchless grace, had turned from the bleeding heart indifferent to its auguration. And she had always danced moved by no warmer impulse than duty; so that the prompting of the spirit in the presence of a strange auditory free to express itself, like that she now faced, came to her for the first time. The dance chosen was one of the wild, quick, pulsating figures wont to be given in thanksgiving for favorable tokens from the deity. The steps were irregular and difficult; a great variety of posturing was required; the head, arms, and feet had each their parts, all to be rendered in harmony. At the commencement she was frightened by the ecstasy that possessed her; suddenly the crowd vanished, and she saw only the beggar, and him wanting bread. Then her form became divinely gifted; she bounded as if winged; advanced and retreated, a moment swaying like a reed, the next whirling like a leaf in a circling wind. The expression of her countenance throughout was so full of soul, so intense, rapt, and beautiful, that the lords were spell-bound. When the figure was ended, there was an outburst of voices, some bidding, others applauding; though most of the spectators were silent from pity and admiration.

Of the competitors the loudest was Iztzil'. In his excitement, he would have sacrificed his province to become the owner of the girl. Maxtla opposed him.

"Five thousand cocoa! Hear, Chalcan!" shouted the Tezcucan.

"A thousand better!" answered Maxtla, laughing at the cacique's rage.

"By all the gods, I will have her! Put me down a thousand quills of gold!"

"A thousand quills above him! Not bread, but riches for the beggar!" replied Maxtla, half in derision.

"Two thousand, — only two thousand quills! More, noble lords! She is worth a palace!" sung Xoli, trembling with excitement; for in such large bids he saw an extraordinary loan. Just then, under the parted curtain of the principal doorway, he beheld one dear to every lover of Tenochtitlan; he stopped. All eyes turned in that direction, and a general exclamation followed, — "The 'tzin, the 'tzin!"

Guatamozin was in full military garb, and armed. As he lingered by the door to comprehend the scene, what with his height, brassy helm, and embossed shield, he looked like a Greek returned from Troy.

"Yeteve, the priestess!" he said. "Impossible!"

He strode to the front.

"How?" he said, placing his hand on her head. "Has Yeteve flown the temple to become a slave?"

Up to this time, it would seem that, in the fixedness of her purpose, she had been blind to all but the beggar, and deaf to everything but the music. Now she knelt at the feet of the noble Aztec, sobbing broken-heartedly. The spectators were moved with sympathy, — all save one.

“Who stays the sale? By all the gods, Chalcán, you shall proceed!”

Scarcely had the words been spoken, or the duller faculties understood them, before Guatamozin confronted the speaker, his javelin drawn, and his shield in readiness. Naturally his countenance was womanly gentle; but the transition of feeling was mighty, and those looking upon him then shrank with dread; it was as if their calm blue lake had in an instant darkened with storm. Face to face he stood with the Tezcucan, the latter unprepared for combat, but in nowise daunted. In their angry attitude a seer might have read the destiny of Anahuac.

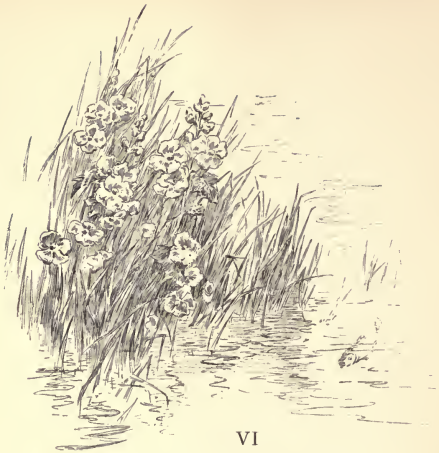
One thrust of the javelin would have sent the traitor to Mictlan; the Empire, as well as the wrongs of the lover, called for it; but before the veterans, recovering from their panic, could rush between the foemen, all the 'tzin's calmness returned.

“Xoli,” he said, “a priestess belongs to the temple, and cannot be sold; such is the law. The sale would have sent your heart, and that of her purchaser, to the Blessed Lady. Remove the girl. I will see that she is taken to a place of safety. Here is gold; give the beggar what he wants, and

keep him until to-morrow. — And, my lords and brethren," he added, turning to the company, "I did not think to behave so unseemly. It is only against the enemies of our country that we should turn our arms. Blood is sacred, and accursed is his hand who sheds that of a countryman in petty quarrel. I pray you, forget all that has passed." And with a low obeisance to them, he walked away, taking with him the possibility of further rencounter.

He had just arrived from his palace at Iztapalapan.





VI

THE CHINAMPA

BETWEEN Tula, the child of Tecalco, and Nenetzin, daughter and child of Acatlan, there existed a sisterly affection. The same sports had engaged them, and they had been, and yet were, inseparable. Their mothers, themselves friends, encouraged the intimacy; and so their past lives had vanished, like two summer clouds borne away by a soft south wind.

The evening after Iztlil's overture of marriage was deepening over lake Tezcuco; the breeze became murmurous and like a breath, and all the

heavens filled with starlight. Cloudless must be the morrow to such a night !

So thought the princess Tula. Won by the beauty of the evening, she had flown from the city to her *chinampa*, which was lying anchored in a quarter of the lake east of the causeway to Tepejaca, beyond the noise of the town, and where no sound less agreeable than the plash of light waves could disturb her dreams.

A retreat more delightful would be a task for fancy. The artisan who knitted the timbers of the *chinampa* had doubtless been a lover of the luxuriant, and built as only a lover can build. The waves of the lake had not been overlooked in his plan ; he had measured their height, and the depth and width of their troughs, when the weather was calm and the water gentle. So he knew both what rocking they would make, and what rocking would be pleasantest to a delicate soul ; for, as there were such souls, there were also such artisans in Tenochtitlan.

Viewed from a distance, the *chinampa* looked like an island of flowers. Except where the canopy of a white pavilion rose from the midst of the green beauty, it was covered to the water's edge with blooming shrubbery, which, this evening, was luminous with the light of lamps. The radiance, glinting through the foliage, tinted the atmosphere above it with mellow rays, and seemed the visible presence of enchantment.

The humid night breeze blew softly under the raised walls of the pavilion, within which, in a

hammock that swung to and fro regularly as the *chinampa* obeyed the waves, lay Tula and Nenetzin.

They were both beautiful, but different in their beauty. Tula's face was round and of a transparent olive complexion, without being fair; her eyes were hazel, large, clear, and full of melancholy earnestness; masses of black hair, evenly parted, fell over her temples, and were gathered behind in a simple knot; with a tall, full form, her presence and manner were grave and very queenly. Whereas, Nenetzin's eyes, though dark, were bright with the light of laughter; her voice was low and sweet, and her manner that of a hoiden. One was the noble woman, the other a jocund child.

"It is late, Tula; our father may want us. Let us return."

"Be patient a little longer. The 'tzin will come for us; he promised to, and you know he never forgets."

"Patience, sister! Ah! you may say it, you who *know*; but how am I to practice it, — I, who have only a *hope*?"

"What do you mean, Nenetzin?"

The girl leaned back, and struck a suspended hoop, in which was perched a large parrot. The touch, though light, interrupted the pendulous motion of the bird, and it pecked at her hand, uttering a gruff scream of rage.

"You spoke of something I know, and you hope. What do you mean, child?"



Nenetzin withdrew her hand from the perch, looked in the questioner's face, then crept up to win her embrace.

"O Tula, I know you are learned and thoughtful. Often after the banquet, when the hall was cleared, and the music begun, have I seen you stand apart, silent, while all others danced or laughed. See, your eyes are on me now, but more in thought than love. Oh, indeed, you are wise! Tell me, did you ever think of me as a woman?"

The smile deepened on the lips, and burned in the eyes of the queenly auditor.

"No, never as a woman," continued Nenetzin. "Listen to me, Tula. The other night I was asleep in your arms, — I felt them in love around me, — and I dreamed so strangely."

"Of what?" asked Tula, seeing she hesitated.

"I dreamed there entered at the palace door a being with a countenance white like snow, while its hair and beard were yellow, like the silk of the maize; its eyes were blue, like the deep water of the lake, but bright, so bright that they terrified while they charmed me. Thinking of it now, O Tula, it was a man, though it looked like a god. He entered at the palace door, and came into the great chamber where our father sat with his chiefs; but he came not barefooted and in *nequen*; he spoke as he were master, and our father a slave. Looking and listening, a feeling thrilled me, — thrilled warm and deep, and was a sense of joy, like a blessing of Tlalac. Since

then, though I have acted as a girl, I have felt as a woman."

"Very strange, indeed, Nenetzin!" said Tula playfully. "But you forget: I asked you what I know, and you only hope?"

"I will explain directly; but as you are wise, first tell me what that feeling was."

"Nay, I can tell you whence the water flows, but I cannot tell you what it is."

"Well, since then I have had a hope" —

"Well?"

"A hope of seeing the white face and blue eyes."

"I begin to understand you, Nenetzin. But go on: what is it I know?"

"What I dreamed, — a great warrior, who loves you. You will see him to-night, and then, O Tula, — then you may tell of the feeling that thrilled me so in my dream."

And with a blush and a laugh, she laid her face in Tula's bosom.

Both were silent awhile, Nenetzin with her face hidden, and Tula looking wistfully up at the parrot swinging lazily in the perch. The dream was singular, and made an impression on the mind of the one as it had on the heart of the other.

"Look up, O Nenetzin!" said Tula, after a while. "Look up, and I will tell you something that has seemed as strange to me as the dream to you."

The girl raised her head.

"Did you ever see Mualox, the old paba of

Quetzal' ? No ? Well, he is said to be a prophet ; a look of his will make a warrior tremble. He is the friend of Guatamozin, who always goes to his shrine to worship the god. I went there once to make an offering. I climbed the steps, went in where the image is, laid my gift on the altar, and turned to depart, when a man came and stood by the door, wearing a surplice, and with long, flowing white beard. He looked at me, then bowed, and kissed the pavement at my feet. I shrank away. 'Fear not, O Tula !' he said. 'I bow to you, not for what you are, but for what you shall be. *You shall be queen in your father's palace !*' With that he arose, and left me to descend."

"Said he so ? How did he know you were Tula, the king's daughter ?"

"That is part of the mystery. I never saw him before ; nor, until I told the story to the 'tzin, did I know the paba. Now, O sister, can the believer of a dream refuse to believe a priest and prophet ?"

"A queen ! You a queen ! I will kiss you now, and pray for you then." And they threw their arms lovingly around each other.

Then the bird above them awoke, and, with a fluttering of its scarlet wings, cried, "Guatamo ! Guatamo !" — taught it by the patient love of Tula.

"Oh, what a time that will be !" Nenetzin went on, with sparkling eyes. "What a garden we will make of Anahuac ! How happy we shall be ! None but the brave and beautiful shall come around us ; for you will be queen, my Tula."

“Yes; and Nenetzin shall have a lord, he whom she loves best, for she will be as peerless as I am powerful,” answered Tula, humoring the mood. “Whom will she take? Let us decide now, — there are so many to choose from. What says she to Cacama, lord of Tezcuco?”

The girl made no answer.

“There is the lord of Chinantla, once a king, who has already asked our father for a wife.”

Still Nenetzin was silent.

“Neither of them! Then there are left but the lord of Tlacopan, and Iztzil’, the Tezcucan.”

At the mention of the last name, a strong expression of disgust burst from Nenetzin.

“A tiger from the museum first! It could be taught to love me. No, none of them for me; none, Tula, if you let me have my way, but the white face and blue eyes I saw in my dream.”

“You are mad, Nenetzin. That was a god, not a man.”

“All the better, Tula! The god will forgive me for loving him.”

Before Tula spoke again, Guatamozin stepped within the pavilion. Nenetzin was noisy in expressing her gladness, while the elder sister betrayed no feeling by words; only her smile and the glow of her eyes intensified.

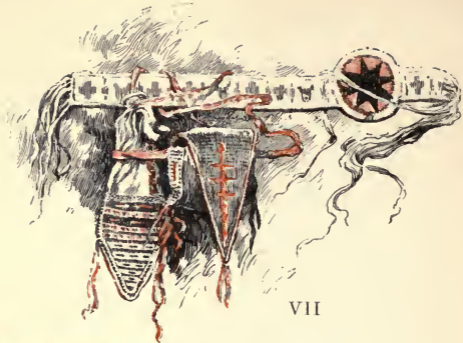
The ’tzin sat down by the hammock, and, with his strong hand staying its oscillation, talked lightly. As yet Tula knew nothing of the proposal of the Tezcucan, or of the favor the king had given it; but the ken of love is as acute as

an angel's ; sorrow of the cherished heart cannot be hidden from it ; so in his very jests she detected a trouble ; but, thinking it had relation to the condition of the Empire, she asked nothing, while he, loath to disturb her happiness, counseled darkly of his own soul.

After a while, as Nenetzin prayed to return to the city, they left the pavilion ; and, following a little path through the teeming shrubbery, and under the boughs of orange-trees, overarched like an arbor, they came to the 'tzin's canoe. The keeper of the *chinampa* was there with great bundles of flowers. Tula and Nenetzin entered the vessel ; then was the time for the slave ; so he threw in the bundles until they were nearly buried under them, — his gifts of love and allegiance. When the rowers pushed off, he knelt with his face to the earth.

Gliding homeward through the dusk, Guatamozin told the story of Yeteve ; and Tula, moved by the girl's devotion, consented to take her into service, — at least, until the temple claimed its own.





VII

COURT GOSSIP



A PINCH of your snuff, Xoli! To be out thus early dulls a nice brain, which nothing clarifies like snuff. By the way, it is very strange that when one wants a good article of any kind, he can only get it at the palace or of you. So, a pinch, my fat fellow!"

"I can commend my snuff," said the Chalcan, bowing very low, "only a little less than the good taste of the most noble Maxtla."

While speaking, — the scene being in his *pulque* room, — he uncovered a gilded jar sitting upon the counter.

"Help yourself; it is good to sneeze."

Maxtla snuffed the scented drug freely, then rushed to the door, and through eyes misty with tears of pleasure looked at the sun rising over the mountains. A fit of sneezing seized him, at

the end of which, a slave stood by his elbow with a ewer of water and a napkin. He bathed his face. Altogether, it was apparent that sneezing had been reduced to an Aztec science.

“Elegant! By the Sun, I feel inspired!”

“No doubt,” responded the Chalcan. “Such ought to be the effect of tobacco and rose-leaves, moistened with dew. But tell me; that *tilmatli* you are wearing is quite royal,—is it from the king?”

The young chief raised the folds of the mantle of *plumaje*, which he was sporting for the first time. “From the king? No; my tailor has just finished it.”

“Certainly, my lord. How dull I was! You are preparing for the banquet at the palace to-morrow night.”

“You recollect the two thousand quills of gold I bid for your priestess the other evening,” said Maxtla, paying no attention to the remark. “I concluded to change the investment; they are all in that collar and loop.”

Xoli examined the loop.

“A *chalchuite*! What jeweler in the city could sell you one so rich?”

“Not one. I bought it of Cacama. It is a crown jewel of Tezcucuo.”

“You were lucky, my lord. But, if you will allow me, what became of the priestess? Saw you ever such dancing?”

“You are late inquiring, Chalcan. The beggar was fast by starvation that night; but you were

nearer death. The story was told the king, — ah! you turn pale. Well you may, — and he swore, by the fires of the temple, if the girl had been sold he would have flayed alive both buyer and seller. Hereafter we had both better look more closely to the law.”

“But she moved my pity as it was never moved before; moreover, she told me they had discharged her from the temple.”

“No matter; the peril is over, and our hearts are our own. Yesterday I saw her in the train of the princess Tula. The 'tzin cared for her. But speaking of the princess, — the banquet to-morrow night will be spicy.”

The Chalcan dropped the precious loop. Gossip that concerned the court was one of his special weaknesses.

“You know,” continued Maxtla, “that the 'tzin has always been a favorite of the king's” —

“As he always deserved to be.”

“Not so fast, Chalcan! Keep your praise. You ought to know that nothing is so fickle as fortune; that what was most popular yesterday may be most unpopular to-day. Hear me out. You also know that Iztzil', the Tezcucan, was down in the royal estimation quite as much as the 'tzin was up; on which account, more than anything else, he lost his father's city.”

Xoli rested his elbow on the counter, and listened eagerly.

“It has been agreed on all sides for years,” continued Maxtla, in his modulated voice, “that

the 'tzin and Tula were to be married upon her coming of age. No one else has presumed to pay her court, lest it might be an interference. Now, the whole thing is at an end. Iztzil', not the 'tzin, is the fortunate man."

"Iztzil'! And to-morrow night!"

"The palace was alive last evening as with a swarming of bees. Some were indignant, — all astonished. In fact, Xoli, I believe the 'tzin had as many friends as the king. Several courtiers openly defended him, notwithstanding his fall, — something that, to my knowledge, never happened before. The upshot was, that a herald went in state to Iztapalapan with a decree prohibiting the 'tzin from visiting Tenochtitlan, under any pretense, until the further pleasure of the king is made known to him."

"Banished, banished! But that the noble Maxtla told me, I could not believe what I hear."

"Certainly. The affair is mysterious, as were the means by which the result was brought about. Look you, Chalcan: the 'tzin loved the princess, and was contracted to her, and now comes this banishment just the day before the valley is called to witness her betrothal to the Tezcucan. Certainly, it would ill become the 'tzin to be a guest at such a banquet."

"I understand," said Xoli, with a cunning smile. "It was to save his pride that he was banished."

"If to be a Chalcan is to be so stupid, I thank the gods for making me what I am!" cried

Maxtla impatiently. "What cares the great king for the pride of the enemy he would humble? The banishment is a penalty, — it is ruin."

There was a pause, during which the Chalcan hung his head.

"Ah, Xoli! The king has changed; he used to be a warrior, loving warriors as the eagle loves its young. Now — alas! I dare not speak. Time was when no envious-hearted knave could have made him believe that Guatamozin was hatching treason in his garden at Iztapalapan. Now, surrounded by mewling priests, he sits in the depths of his palace, and trembles, and, like a credulous child, believes everything. 'Woe is Tenochtitlan!' said Mualox; and the days strengthen the prophecy. But enough, — more than enough! Hist, Chalcan! What I have said and you listened to — yea, the mere listening — would suffice, if told in the right ears, to send us both straightway to the tigers. I have paid you for your snuff, and the 'divine sneeze. In retailing, recollect, I am not the manufacturer. Farewell."

"Stay a moment, most noble chief, — but a moment," said the Chalcan. "I have invented a drink which I desire you to inaugurate. If I may be counted a judge, it is fit for a god."

"A judge! You? Where is the man who would deny you that excellence? Your days have been spent in the practice; nay, your whole life has been one long, long drink. Make haste. I will wager *pulque* is chief in the compound."

The broker went out, and directly returned, bearing on a waiter a Cholulan goblet full of cool liquor, exquisitely colored with the rich blood of the cactus apple. Maxtla sipped, drank, then swore the drink was without a rival.

“Look you, Chalcan. They say we are indebted to our heroes, our minstrels, and our priests, and I believe so; but hereafter I shall go farther in the faith. This drink is worth a victory, is pleasant as a song, and has all the virtues of a prayer. Do not laugh. I am in earnest. You shall be canonized with the best of them. To show that I am no vain boaster, you shall come to the banquet to-morrow, and the king shall thank you. Put on your best *tilmatli*, and above all else, beware that the vase holding this liquor is not empty when I call for it. Farewell!”





VIII

GUATAMOZIN AND MUALOX



UP the steps of the old Cû of Quetzal', early in the evening of the banquet, went Guatamozin unattended. As the royal interdiction rested upon his coming to the capital, he was muffled in a priestly garb, which hid his face and person, but could not all disguise the stately bearing that so distinguished him. Climbing the steps slowly, and without halting at the top to note the signs of the city, all astir with life, he crossed the *azoteas*, entered the chamber most sanctified by the presence of the god, and before the image bowed awhile in prayer. Soon Mualox came in.

“Ask anything that is not evil, O best beloved

of Quetzal', and it shall be granted," said the paba solemnly, laying a hand upon the visitor's shoulder. "I knew you were coming; I saw you on the lake. Arise, my son."

Guatamozin stood up, and flung back his hood.

"The house is holy, Mualox, and I have come to speak of the things of life that have little to do with religion."

"That is not possible. Everything has to do with life, which has all to do with heaven. Speak out. This presence will keep you wise; if your thoughts be of wrong, it is not likely you will give them speech in the very ear of Quetzal'."

Slowly the 'tzin then said, —

"Thanks, father. In what I have to say, I will be brief, and endeavor not to forget the presence. You love me, and I am come for counsel. You know how often those most discreet in the affairs of others are foolish in what concerns themselves. Long time ago you taught me the importance of knowledge; how it was the divine secret of happiness, and stronger than a spear to win victories, and better in danger than a shield seven times quilted. Now I have come to say that my habits of study have brought evil upon me; out of the solitude in which I was toiling to lay up a great knowlege, a misfortune has arisen, father to my ruin. My stay at home has been misconstrued. Enemies have said I loved books less than power; they charge that in the quiet of my gardens I have been taking council of my ambition, which nothing satisfies but the throne;

and so they have estranged from me the love of the king. Here against his order, forbidden the city," — and as he spoke he raised his head proudly, — "forbidden the city, behold me, paba, a banished man!"

Mualox smiled, and grim satisfaction was in the smile.

"If you seek sympathy," he said, "the errand is fruitless. I have no sorrow for what you call your misfortune."

"Let me understand you, father."

"I repeat, I have no sorrow for you. Why should I? I see you as you should see yourself. You confirm the lessons of which you complain. Not vainly that you wrought in solitude for knowledge, which, while I knew it would make you a mark for even kingly envy, I also intended should make you superior to misfortunes and kings. Understand you now? What matters that you are maligned? What is banishment? They only liken you the more to Quetzal', whose coming triumph, — heed me well, O 'tzin, — whose coming triumph shall be your triumph."

The look and voice of the holy man were those of one with authority.

"For this time," he continued, "and others like it, yet to come, I thought to arm your soul with a strong intelligence. Your life is to be a battle against evil; fail not yourself in the beginning. Success will be equal to your wisdom and courage. But your story was not all told."

The 'tzin's face flushed, and he replied, with some faltering, —

“ You have known and encouraged the love I bear the princess Tula, and counted on it as the means of some great fortune in store for me. Yet, in part at least, I am banished on that account. O Mualox, the banquet which the king holds to-night is to make public the betrothal of Tula to Iztzil', the Tezcucan ! ”

“ Well, what do you intend ? ”

“ Nothing. Had the trouble been a friend's, I might have advised him ; but being my own, I have no confidence in myself. I repose on your discretion and friendship.”

Mualox softened his manner, and said, pleasantly at first, “ O 'tzin, is humanity all frailty ? Must chief and philosopher bow to the passion, like a slave or a dealer in wares ? ” Suddenly he became serious ; his eyes shone full of the magnetism he used so often and so well. “ Can Guatamozin find nothing higher to occupy his mind than a trouble born of a silly love ? Unmanned by such a trifle ? Arouse ! Ponder the mightier interests in peril ! What is a woman, with all a lover's gild about her, to the nation ? ”

“ The nation ? ” repeated the 'tzin slowly.

The paba looked reverently up to the idol. “ I have withdrawn from the world, I live but for Quetzal' and Anahuac. Oh, generously has the god repaid me ! He has given me to look out upon the future ; all that is to come affecting my country he has shown me.” Turning to the 'tzin again, he said with emphasis, “ I could tell marvels, — let this content you : words cannot paint

the danger impending over our country, over Anahuac, the beautiful and beloved; her existence, and the glory and power that make her so worthy love like ours, are linked to your action. Your fate, O 'tzin, and hers, and that of the many nations, are one and the same. Accept the words as a prophecy; wear them in memory; and when, as now, you are moved by a trifling fear or anger, they should and will keep you from shame and folly."

Both then became silent. The paba might have been observing the events of the future, as, one by one, they rose and passed before his abstracted vision. Certain it was, with the thoughts of the warrior there mixed an ambition no longer selfish, but all his country's.

Mualox finally concluded. "The future belongs to the gods; only the present is ours. Of that let us think. Admit your troubles worthy vengeance: dare you tell me what you thought of doing? My son, why are you here?"

"Does my father seek to mortify me?"

"Would the 'tzin have me encourage folly, if not worse? And that in the presence of my god and his?"

"Speak plainly, Mualox."

"So I will. Obey the king. Go not to the palace to-night. If the thought of giving the woman to another is so hard, could you endure the sight? Think: if present, what could you do to prevent the betrothal?"

A savage anger flashed from the 'tzin's face,

and he answered, "What could I? Slay the Tezcucan on the step of the throne, though I died!"

"It would come to that. And Anahuac! What then of her?" said Mualox, in a voice of exceeding sorrow.

The love the warrior bore his country at that moment surpassed all others, and his rage passed away.

"True, most true! If it should be as you say, that my destiny" —

"If! O 'tzin, if you live! If Anahuac lives! If there are gods!" —

"Enough, Mualox! I know what you would say. Content you; I give you all faith. The wrong that tortures me is not altogether that the woman is to be given to another; her memory I could pluck from my heart as a feather from my helm. If that were all, I could curse the fate, and submit; but there is more: for the sake of a cowardly policy I have been put to shame; treachery and treason have been crowned, loyalty and blood disgraced. Hear me, father! After the decree of interdiction was served upon me, I ventured to send a messenger to the king, and he was spurned from the palace. Next went the lord Cuitlahua, uncle of mine, and true lover of Anahuac; he was forbidden the mention of my name. I am not withdrawn from the world; my pride will not down at a word; so wronged, I cannot reason; therefore I am here."

"And the coming is a breach of duty; the risk

is great. Return to Iztapalapan before the midnight is out. And I, — but you do not know, my son, what a fortune has befallen me.” The paba smiled faintly. “I have been promoted to the palace; I am a councilor at the royal table.”

“A councilor! You, father?”

The good man’s face grew serious again. “I accepted the appointment, thinking good might result. But, alas! the hope was vain. Montezuma, once so wise, is past counsel. He will take no guidance. And what a vanity! O ’tzin, the asking me to the palace was itself a crime, since it was to make me a weapon in his hand with which to resist the holy Quetzal’. As though I could not see the design!”

He laughed scornfully, and then said, “But be not detained, my son. What I can, I will do for you; at the council-table, and elsewhere, as opportunity may offer, I will exert my influence for your restoration to the city and palace. Go now. Farewell; peace be with you. To-morrow I will send you tidings.”

Thereupon he went out of the tower, and down into the temple.



IX

A KING'S BANQUET



At last the evening of the royal banquet arrived, — theme of incessant talk and object of preparation for two days and a night, out of the capital no less than in it; for all the nobler classes within a convenient radius of the lake had been bidden, and, with them, people of distinction, such as successful artists, artisans, and merchants.

It is not to be supposed that a king of Montezuma's subtlety in matters governmental could overlook the importance of the social element, or neglect it. Education imports a society; more yet, academies, such as were in Tenochtitlan for the culture of women, always import a refined and cultivated society. And such there was in the beautiful valley.

My picture of the entertainment will be feeble,

I know, and I give it rather as a suggestion of the reality, which was gorgeous enough to be interesting to any nursling even of the court of His Most Catholic Majesty ; for, though heathen in religion, Montezuma was not altogether barbarian in taste ; and, sooth to say, no monarch in Christendom better understood the influence of kingliness splendidly maintained. About it, moreover, was all that makes chivalry adorable, — the dance, the feast, the wassail ; brave men, fair women, and the majesty of royalty in state amidst its most absolute proofs of power.

On such occasions it was the custom of the great king to throw open the palace, with all its accompaniments, for the delight of his guests, admitting them freely to aviary, menagerie, and garden, the latter itself spacious enough for the recreation of thirty thousand persons.

The house, it must be remembered, formed a vast square, with *patios* or courtyards in the interior, around which the rooms were ranged. The part devoted to domestic uses was magnificently furnished. Another very considerable portion was necessary to the state and high duties of the monarch ; such were offices for his functionaries, quarters for his guards, and chambers for the safe deposit of the archives of the Empire, consisting of maps, laws, decrees and proclamations, accounts and reports financial and military, and the accumulated trophies of campaigns and conquests innumerable. When we consider the regard in which the king was held by his people,

amounting almost to worship, and their curiosity to see all that pertained to his establishment, an idea may be formed of what the palace and its appurtenances were as accessories to one of his entertainments.

Passing from the endless succession of rooms, the visitor might go into the garden, where the walks were freshly strewn with shells, the shrubbery studded with colored lamps, the fountains all at play, and the air loaded with the perfume of flowers, which were an Aztec passion, and seemed everywhere a part of everything.

And all this convenience and splendor was not wasted upon an inappreciative horde, — ferocious Caribs or simple children of Hispaniola. At such times the order requiring the wearing of *nequen* was suspended ; so that in the matter of costume there were no limits upon the guest, except such as were prescribed by his taste or condition. In the animated current that swept from room to room and from house to garden might be seen citizens in plain attire, and warriors arrayed in regalia which permitted all dazzling colors, and pabas hooded, surpliced, and gowned, brooding darkly even there, and stoled minstrels, with their harps, and pages, gay as butterflies, while over all was the beauty of the presence of lovely women.

Yet, withal, the presence of Montezuma was more attractive than the calm night in the garden ; neither stars, nor perfumed summer airs, nor singing fountains, nor walks strewn with shells, nor chant of minstrels could keep the guests from

the great hall where he sat in state ; so that it was alike the centre of all coming and all going. There the aged and sedate whiled away the hours in conversation ; the young danced, laughed, and were happy ; and in the common joyousness none exceeded the beauties of the harem, transiently released from the jealous thralldom that made the palace their prison.

From the house-tops, or from the dykes, or out on the water, the common people of the capital, in vast multitudes, witnessed the coming of the guests across the lake. The rivalry of the great lords and families was at all times extravagant in the matter of pomp and show ; a king's banquet, however, seemed its special opportunity, and the lake its particular field of display. The king Cacama, for example, left his city in a canoe of exquisite workmanship, pranked with pennons, ribbons, and garlands ; behind him, or at his right and left, constantly plying and deploying, attended a flotilla of hundreds of canoes only a little less rich in decoration than his own, and timed in every movement, even that of the paddles, by the music of conch-shells and tambours ; yet princely as the turn-out was, it did not exceed that of the lord Cuitlahua, governor of Iztapalapan. And if others were inferior to them in extravagance, nevertheless they helped clothe the beloved sea with a beauty and interest scarcely to be imagined by people who never witnessed or read of the grand Venetian pageants.

Arrived at the capital, the younger warriors

proceeded to the palace afoot ; while the matrons and maids, and the older and more dignified lords, were borne thither in palanquins. By evening the whole were assembled.

About the second quarter of the night two men came up the great street to the palace, and made their way through the palanquins stationed there in waiting. They were guests ; so their garbs bespoke them. One wore the gown and carried the harp of a minstrel ; very white locks escaped from his hood, and a staff was required to assist his enfeebled steps. The other was younger, and with consistent vanity sported a military costume. To say the truth, his extremely warlike demeanor lost nothing by the flash of a dauntless eye and a step that made the pave ring again.

An official received them at the door, and, by request, conducted them to the garden.

“This is indeed royal !” the warrior said to the minstrel. “It bewilders me. Be yours the lead.”

“I know the walks as a deer his paths, or a bird the brake that shelters its mate. Come,” and the voice was strangely firm for one so aged, — “come, let us see the company.”

Now and then they passed ladies, escorted by gallants, and frequently there were pauses to send second looks after the handsome soldier, and words of pity for his feeble companion. By and by, coming to an intersection of the walk they were pursuing, they were hailed, — “Stay, minstrel, and give us a song.”

By the door of a summer-house they saw, upon

stopping, a girl whose beauty was worthy the tribute she sought. The elder sat down upon a bench and replied,—

“A song is gentle medicine for sorrows. Have you such? You are very young.”

Her look of sympathy gave place to one of surprise.

“I would I were assured that minstrelsy is your proper calling.”

“You doubt it! Here is my harp: a soldier is known by his shield.”

“But I have heard your voice before,” she persisted.

“The children of Tenochtitlan, and many who are old now, have heard me sing.”

“But I am a Chalcan.”

“I have sung in Chalco.”

“May I ask your name?”

“There are many streets in the city, and on each they call me differently.”

The girl was still perplexed.

“Minstrels have patrons,” she said directly; “who” —

“Nay, child, this soldier here is all the friend I have.”

Some one then threw aside the vine that draped the door. While the minstrel looked to see who the intruder was, his inquisitor gazed at the soldier, who, on his part, saw neither of them; he was making an obeisance so very low that his face and hand both touched the ground.

“Does the minstrel intend to sing, Yeteve?”



asked Nenetzin, stepping into the light that flooded the walk.

The old man bent forward on his seat.

"Heaven's best blessing on the child of the king! It should be a nobler hand than mine that strikes a string to one so beautiful."

The comely princess replied, her face beaming with pleasure, "Verily, minstrel, much familiarity with song has given you courtly speech."

"I have courtly friends, and only borrow their words. This place is fair, but to my dull fancy it seems that a maiden would prefer the great hall, unless she has a grief to indulge."

"Oh, I have a great grief," she returned; "though I do borrow it as you your words."

"Then you love some one who is unhappy. I understand. Is this child in your service?" he asked, looking at Yeteve.

"Call it mine. She loves me well enough to serve me."

The minstrel struck the strings of his harp softly, as if commencing a mournful story.

"I have a friend," he said, "a prince and warrior, whose presence here is banned. He sits in his palace to-night, and is visited by thoughts such as make men old in their youth. He has seen much of life, and won fame, but is fast finding that glory does not sweeten misfortune, and that of all things ingratitude is the most bitter. His heart is set upon a noble woman; and now, when his love is strongest, he is separated from her, and may not say farewell. Oh, it is not in the ear of a

true woman that lover so unhappy could breathe his story in vain. What would the princess Nenetzin do, if she knew a service of hers might soothe his great grief?"

Nenetzin's eyes were dewy with tears.

"Good minstrel, I know the story; it is the 'tzin's. Are you a friend of his?"

"His true friend. I bring his farewell to Tula."

"I will serve him." And, stepping to the old man, she laid her hand on his. "Tell me what to do, and what you would have."

"Only a moment's speech with her."

"With Tula?"

"A moment to say the farewell he cannot. Go to the palace, and tell her what I seek. I will follow directly. Tell her she may know me in the throng by these locks, whose whiteness will prove my sincerity and devotion. And further, I will twine my harp with a branch of this vine; its leaves will mark me, and at the same time tell her that his love is green as in the day a king's smile sunned it into ripeness. Be quick. The moment comes when she cannot in honor listen to the message I am to speak."

He bent over his harp again, and Nenetzin and Yeteve hurried away.



X

THE 'TZIN'S LOVE



HE minstrel stayed awhile to dress his harp with the vine.

“A woman would have done it better; they have a special cunning for such things; yet it will serve the purpose. Now let us on!” he said, when the task was finished.

To the palace they then turned their steps. As they approached it, the walk became more crowded with guests. Several times the minstrel was petitioned to stay and sing, but he excused himself.

He proceeded, looking steadily at the ground, as is the custom of the very aged. Amongst others, they met Maxtla, gay in his trappings as a parrot from the Great River.

“Good minstrel,” he said, “in your wanderings through the garden, have you seen Iztli’, the Tezcucan?”

“I have not seen the Tezcucan. I should look for him in the great hall, where his bride is, rather than in the garden, dreaming of his bridal.”

“Well said, uncle! I infer your harp is not carried for show; you can sing! I will try you after a while.”

When he was gone, the minstrel spoke bitterly, —

“Beware of the thing known in the great house yonder as policy. A week ago the lord Maxtla would have scorned to be seen hunting the Tezcucan, whom he hates.”

They came to a portal above which, in a niche of the wall, sat the *teotl*¹ of the house, grimly claiming attention and worship. Under the portal, past the guard on duty there, through many apartments full of objects of wonder to the stranger, they proceeded, and, at last, with a current of guests slowly moving in the same direction, reached the hall dominated by the king, where the minstrel thought to find the princess Tula.

“Oh, my friend, I pray you, let me stay here a moment,” said the warrior, abashed by dread of the sudden introduction to the royal presence. The singer heard not, but went on.

¹ A household god.

Standing by the door, the young stranger looked down a hall of great depth eastwardly, broken by two rows of pillars supporting vast oaken girders, upon which rested rafters of red cedar. The walls were divided into panels, with borders broad and intricately arabesqued. A massive bracket in the centre of each panel held the image of a deity, the duplicate of the idol in the proper sanctuary; and from the feet of the image radiated long arms of wood, well carved, crooked upward at the elbows, and ending with shapely hands, clasping lanterns of *aguave* which emitted lights of every tint. In the central space, between the rows of pillars, immense chandeliers dropped from the rafters, so covered with lamps that they looked like pyramids aglow. And arms, and images, and chandeliers, and even the huge pillars, were wreathed in garlands of cedar boughs and flowers, from which the air drew a redolence as of morning in a garden.

Through all these splendors, the gaze of the visitor sped to the further end of the hall, and there stayed as charmed. He saw a stage, bright with crimson carpeting, rising three steps above the floor, and extending from wall to wall; and on that, covered with green *plumaje*, a dais, on which, in a chair or throne glittering with burnished gold, the king sat. Above him spread a canopy fashioned like a broad sunshade, the staff resting on the floor behind the throne, sustained by two full-armed warriors, who, while motionless as statues, were yet vigilant as sentinels. Around

the dais, their costumes and personal decorations sharing the monarch's splendor, were collected his queens, and their children, and all who might claim connection with the royal family. The light shone about them as the noonday, so full that all that portion of the hall seemed bursting with sunshine. Never satin richer than the emerald cloth of the canopy, inwoven, as it was, with feathers of humming-birds! Never sheen of stars, to the eyes of the wondering stranger, sharper than the glinting of the jewels with which it was fringed!

And the king appeared in happier mood than common, though the deep, serious look which always accompanies a great care came often to his face. He had intervals of silence also; yet his shrewdest guests were not permitted to see that he did not enjoy their enjoyment.

His queens were seated at his left, Tecalco deeply troubled, sometimes tearful, and Acatlan cold and distant; for, in thought of her own child, the beautiful Nenetzin, she trembled before the remorseless policy.

And Tula, next to the king the recipient of attention, sat in front of her mother, never more queenly, never so unhappy. Compliments came to her, and congratulations, given in courtly style; minstrels extolled her grace and beauty, and the prowess and martial qualities of the high-born Tezcucan; and priest and warrior laid their homage at her feet. Yet her demeanor was not that of the glad young bride; she never smiled, and her eyes, commonly so lustrous, were dim and

hopeless ; her thoughts were with her heart, across the lake with the banished 'tzin.

As may be conjectured, it was no easy game to steal her from place so conspicuous ; nevertheless, Nenetzin awaited the opportunity.

It happened that Maxtla was quite as anxious to get the monarch's ear for the benefit of his friend, the Chalcan, — in fact, for the introduction of the latter's newly invented drink. Experience taught the chief when the felicitous moment arrived. He had then but to say the word : a page was sent, the liquor brought. Montezuma sipped, smiled, quaffed deeper, and was delighted.

“There is nothing like it !” he said. “Bring goblets for my friends, and fill up again !”

All the lordly personages about him had then to follow his example, — to drink and approve. At the end, Xoli was summoned.

Nenetzin saw the chance, and said, “O Tula, such a song as we have heard ! It was sweeter than that of the bird that wakes us in the morning, sweeter than all the flutes in the hall.”

“And the singer, — who was he ?”

Neither Nenetzin nor Yeteve could tell his name.

“He charmed us so,” said the former, “that we thought only of taking you to hear him. Come, go with us. There never was such music or musician.”

And the three came down from the platform unobserved by the king. When the minstrel's message was delivered, then was shown how well

the Tezcucan had spoken when he said of the royal children, "They are all beautiful, but only one is fitted to be a warrior's wife."

"Let us see the man," said Tula. "How may we know him, Nenetzin?"

And they went about eagerly looking for the singer with the gray locks and the vine-wreathed harp. They found him at last about midway the hall, leaning on his staff, a solitary amidst the throng. No one thought of asking him for a song; he was too old, too like one come from a tomb with unfashionable stories.

"Father," said Tula, "we claim your service. You look weary, yet you must know the ancient chants, which, though I would not like to say it everywhere, please me best. Will you sing?"

He raised his head, and looked at her; she started. Something she saw in his eyes that had escaped her friends.

"A song from me!" he replied, as if astonished. "No, it cannot be. I have known some gentle hearts, and studied them to remember; but long since they went to dust. You do not know me. Imagining you discerned of what I was thinking, you were moved; you only pitied me, here so desolate."

As he talked, she recovered her composure.

"Will you sing for me, father?" she again asked.

"Oh, willingly! My memory is not so good as it used to be; yet one song, at least, I will give you from the numberless ills that crowd it."

He looked slowly and tremulously around at the guests who had followed her, or stopped, as they were passing, to hear the conversation.

“As you say,” he then continued, “I am old and feeble, and it is wearisome to stand here; besides, my theme will be sad, and such as should be heard in quiet. Time was when my harp had honor, — to me it seems but yesterday; but now — enough! Here it were not well that my voice should be heard.”

She caught his meaning, and her whole face kindled; but Nenetzin spoke first.

“Oh, yes; let us to the garden!”

The minstrel bowed reverently. As they started, a woman, who had been listening, said, “Surely, the noble Tula is not going! The man is a dotard; he cannot sing; he is palsied.”

But they proceeded, and through the crowd and out of the hall guided the trembling minstrel. Coming to a passage that seemed to be deserted, they turned into it, and Nenetzin, at Tula's request, went back to the king. Then a change came over the good man; his stooping left him, his step became firm, and, placing himself in front, he said, in a deep, strong voice, —

“It is mine to lead now. I remember these halls. Once again, O Tula, let me lead you here, as I have a thousand times in childhood.”

And to a chamber overlooking the garden, by the hand he led her, followed by Yeteve, sobbing like a child. A dim light from the lamps without disclosed the walls hung with trophies captured

in wars with the surrounding tribes and nations. Where the rays were strongest, he stopped, and removed the hood, and said earnestly, —

“Against the king’s command, and loving you better than life, O Tula, Guatamozin has come to say farewell.”

There was a great silence; each heard the beating of the other’s heart.

“You have passed from me,” he continued, “and I send my grief after you. I look into your face, and see fade our youth, our hopes, and our love, and all the past that bore it relation. The days of pleasantness are ended; the spring that fed the running brook is dry. O Tula, dear one, the bird that made us such sweet music is songless forever!”

Her anguish was too deep for the comfort of words or tears. Closer he clasped her hand.

“Oh, that power should be so faithless! Here are banners that I have taken. Yonder is a shield of a king of Michuaca whom I slew. I well remember the day. Montezuma led the army; the fight was hard, the peril great; and after I struck the blow, he said I had saved his life, and vowed me boundless love and a splendid reward. What a passion the field of fighting men was! And yet there was another always greater. I had dwelt in the palace, and learned that in the smile of the noble Tula there was to my life what the sunshine is to the flower.”

He faltered, then continued brokenly, —

“He had honors, palaces, provinces, and crowns

to bestow; but witness, O gods, whose sacred duty it is to punish ingratitude, — witness that I cared more to call Tula wife than for all the multitude of his princeliest gifts!”

And now fast ran the tears of the princess, through sorrow rising to full womanhood, while the murky chamber echoed with the sobs of Yeteve. If the ghost of the barbarian king yet cared for the shield he died defending, if it were there present, seeing and hearing, its revenge was perfect.

“If Guatamozin — so dear to me now, so dear always — will overlook the womanly selfishness that could find a pleasure in his grief, I will prove that he has not loved unworthily. You have asked nothing of me, nor urged any counsel, and I thank you for the moderation. I thank you, also, that you have spoken as if this sorrow were not yours more than mine. Most of all, O 'tzin, I thank you for not accusing me. Need I say how I hate the Tezcucan? or that I am given away against my will? I am to go as a price, as so much *cocoa*, in purchase of the fealty of a wretch who would league with Mictlan to humble my father. I am a weak woman, without tribes or banner, and therefore the wrong is put upon me. But have I no power?” And, trembling with the strong purpose, she laid her hand upon his breast. “Wife will I never be except of Guatamozin. I am the daughter of a king. My father, at least, should know me. He may sell me, but, thank the holy gods, I am the keeper of

my own life. And what would life be with the base Tezcucan for my master? Royal power in a palace of pearl and gold would not make it worth the keeping. O 'tzin, you never threw a worthless leaf upon the lake more carelessly than I would then fling this poor body there!"

Closer to his heart he pressed the hand on his breast.

"To you, to you, O Tula, be the one blessing greater than all others which the gods keep back in the Sun! So only can you be rewarded. I take your words as an oath. Keep them, only keep them, and I will win for you all that can be won by man. What a time is coming" —

Just then a joyous cry and a burst of laughter from the garden interrupted his passionate speech, and recalled him to himself and the present, — to the present, which was not to be satisfied with lovers' rhapsodies. And so he said, when next he spoke, —

"You have answered my most jealous wish. Go back now; make no objection to the Tezcucan: the betrothal is not the bridal. The king and Iztzil' cannot abide together in peace. I know them."

And sinking his voice, he added, "Your hand is on my heart, and by its beating you cannot fail to know how full it is of love. Take my blessing to strengthen you. Farewell. I will return to my gardens and dreams."

"To dreams! And with such a storm coming upon Anahuac!" said Tula. "No, no; to dream is mine."

Up, clear to his vision, rose the destiny prophesied for him by Mualox. As he pondered it, she said, tearfully, —

“I love my father, and he is blind or mad. Now is his peril greatest, now most he needs friendship and help. O 'tzin, leave him not, — I conjure you by his past kindness! Remember I am his child.”

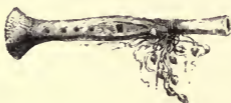
Thereupon he dropped her hand, and walked the floor, while the banners and the shields upon the walls, and the mute glory they perpetuated, whispered of the wrong and shame he was enduring. When he answered, she knew how great the struggle had been, and that the end was scarcely a victory.

“You have asked that of me, my beloved, which is a sore trial,” he said. “I will not deny that the great love I bore your father is disturbed by bitterness. Think how excessive my injury is, — I who revered as a son, and have already put myself in death's way for him. In the halls, and out in the gardens, my name has been a jest to-night. And how the Tezcucan has exulted! It is hard for the sufferer to love his wrong-doer, — oh, so hard! But this I will, and as an oath take the promise: as long as the king acts for Anahuac, not imperiling her safety or glory, so long will I uphold him; this, O Tula, from love of country, and nothing more!”

And as the future was veiled against the woman and dutiful child, she replied simply, “I accept the oath. Now lead me hence.”

He took her hand again, and said, "In peril of life I came to say farewell forever; but I will leave a kiss upon your forehead, and plant its memory in your heart, and some day come again to claim you mine."

And he put his arm around her, and left the kiss on her forehead, and, as the ancient he entered, conducted the unhappy princess from the chamber of banners back to the hall of betrothal.





XI

THE CHANT



F you have there anything for laughter, Maxtla, I bid you welcome," said the king, his guests around him.

And the young chief knelt on the step before the throne, and answered with mock solemnity, "Your servant, O king, knows your great love of minstrelsy, and how it delights you to make rich the keeper of a harp who sings a good song well. I have taken one who bears him like a noble singer, and has age to warrant his experience."

"Call you that the man?" asked the king, pointing to Guatamozin.

"He is the man."

The monarch laughed, and all the guests listening laughed.

Now, minstrels were common on all festive occasions; indeed, an Aztec banquet was no more

perfect without them than without guests : but it was seldom the royal halls were graced by one so very aged ; so that the bent form and gray locks, that at other places and times would have insured safety and respect, now excited derision. The men thought his presence there presumptuous, the women laughed at him as a dotard. In brief, the 'tzin's peril was very great.

He seemed, however, the picture of aged innocence, and stood before the throne, his head bowed, his face shaded by the hood, leaning humbly on his staff, and clasping the harp close to his breast, the vines yet about it. So well did he observe his disguise, that none there, save Tula and Yeteve, might dream that the hood and dark gown concealed the boldest warrior in Tenochtitlan. The face of the priestess was turned away ; but the princess sat a calm witness of the scene ; either she had too much pride to betray her solicitude, or a confidence in his address so absolute that she felt none.

“He is none of ours,” said the king, when he had several times scanned the minstrel. “If the palace ever knew him, it was in the days of Axaya’, from whose tomb he seems to have come.”

“As I came in from the garden, I met him going out,” said Maxtla, in explanation. “I could not bear that my master should lose such a promise of song. Besides, I have heard the veterans in service often say that the ancient chants were the best, and I thought it a good time to test the boast.”

The gray courtiers frowned, and the king laughed again.

“My minstrel here represented that old time so well,” continued Maxtla, “that at first I was full of reverence; therefore I besought him to come, and before you, O king, sing the chants that used to charm your mighty father. I thought it no dishonor for him to compete with the singers now in favor, they giving us something of the present time. He declined in courtliest style; saying that, though his voice was good, he was too old, and might shame the ancient minstrelsy; and that, from what he had heard, my master delighted only in things of modern invention. A javelin in the hand of a sentinel ended the argument, and he finally consented. Wherefore, O king, I claim him captive, to whom, if it be your royal pleasure, I offer liberty, if he will sing in competition before this noble company.”

What sport could be more royal than such poetic contest, — the old reign against the new? Montezuma welcomed the idea.

“The condition is reasonable,” he said. “Is there a minstrel in the valley to call it otherwise?”

In a tone scarcely audible, though all were silent that they might hear, the 'tzin answered, —

“Obedience was the first lesson of every minstrel of the old time; but as the master we served loved us as his children, we never had occasion to sing for the purchase of our liberty. And more, — the capture of a harmless singer, though he were

not aged as your poor slave, O king, was not deemed so brave a deed as to be rewarded by our master's smile."

The speech, though feebly spoken, struck both the king and his chief.

"Well done, uncle!" said the former, laughing. "And since you have tongue so sharp, we remove the condition" —

"Thanks, many thanks, most mighty king! May the gods mete you nothing but good! I will depart." And the 'tzin stooped till his harp struck the floor.

The monarch waved his hand. "Stay. I merely spoke of the condition that made your liberty depend upon your song. Go, some of you, and call my singers." A courtier hurried away, then the king added, "It shall be well for him who best strikes the strings. I promise a prize that shall raise him above trouble, and make his life what a poet's ought to be."

Guatamozin advanced, and knelt on the step from which Maxtla had risen, and said, his voice sounding tremulous with age and infirmity, —

"If the great king will deign to heed his servant again, — I am old and weak. There was a time when I would have rejoiced to hear a prize so princely offered in such a trial. But that was many, many summers ago. And this afternoon, in my hut by the lake-shore, when I took my harp, all covered with dust, from the shelf where it had so long lain untouched and neglected, and wreathed it with this fresh vine, thinking a gay

dress might give it the appearance of use, and myself a deceitful likeness to the minstrel I once was, alas! I did not think of my trembling hand and my shattered memory, or of trial like this. I only knew that a singer, however humble, was privileged at your banquet, and that the privilege was a custom of the monarchs now in their halls in the Sun, — true, kingly men, who, at time like this, would have put gold in my hand, and bade me arise, and go in peace. Is Montezuma more careless of his glory? Will he compel my song, and dishonor my gray hair, that I may go abroad in Tenochtitlan and tell the story? In pity, O king, suffer me to depart."

The courtiers murmured, and even Maxtla relented, but the king said, "Good uncle, you excite my curiosity the more. If your common speech have in it such a vein of poetry, what must the poetry be? And then, does not your obstinacy outmeasure my cruelty? Get ready, I hold the fortune. Win it, and I am no king if it be not yours."

The interest of the bystanders now exceeded their pity. It was novel to find one refusing reward so rich, when the followers of his art were accustomed to gratify an audience, even one listener, upon request.

And, seeing that escape from the trial was impossible, the 'tzin arose, resolved to act boldly. Minstrelsy, as practiced by the Aztecs, it must be remembered, was not singing so much as a form of chanting, accompanied by rhythmical

touches of the lyre or harp, — of all kinds of choral music the most primitive. This he had practiced, but in the solitude of his study. The people present knew the 'tzin Guatamo, supposed to be in his palace across the lake, as soldier, scholar, and prince, but not as poet or singer of heroic tales. So that confident minstrelsy was now but another, if not a surer, disguise. And the eyes of the princess Tula shining upon him calmly and steadily, he said, his voice this time trembling with suppressed wrath, —

“Be it so, O king! Let the singers come, — let them come. Your slave will fancy himself before the great Axaya' or your father, not less royal. He will forget his age, and put his trust in the god whose story he will sing.”

Then other amusements were abandoned, and, intelligence of the trial flying far and fast, lords and ladies, soldiers and priests crowded about the throne and filled the hall. That any power of song could belong to one so old and unknown was incredible.

“He is a provincial, — the musician of one of the hamlets,” said a courtier derisively.

“Yes,” sneered another, “he will tell how the flood came, and drowned the harvest in his neighborhood.”

“Or,” ventured a third, “how a ravenous vulture once descended from the hills, and carried off his pet rabbit.”

By and by the royal minstrels came, — sleek, comely men, wearing long stoles fringed with

gold, and having harps inlaid with pearl, and strung with silver wires. With scarce a glance at their humble competitor, they ranged themselves before the monarch.

The trial began. One after another, the favorites were called upon. The first sang of love, the next of his mistress, the third of Lake Tezucuo, the fourth of Montezuma, his power, wisdom, and glory. Before all were through, the patience of the king and crowd was exhausted. The pabas wanted something touching religion, the soldiers something heroic and resounding with war; and all waited for the stranger, as men listening to a story wait for the laughter it may chance to excite. How were they surprised! Before the womanly tones of the last singer ceased, the old man dropped his staff, and, lifting his harp against his breast, struck its chords, and in a voice clear and vibratory as the blast of a shell, a voice that filled the whole hall, and startled maid and king alike, began his chant.

QUETZAL'.

Beloved of the Sun! Mother of the
 Brave! Azatlan, the North-born! Heard be thou
 In my far launched voice! I sing to thy
 Listening children of thee and Heaven.
 Vale in the Sun, where dwell the Gods! Sum of
 The beautiful art thou! Thy forests are
 Flowering trees; of crystal and gold thy
 Mountains; and liquid light are thy rivers
 Flowing, all murmurous with songs, over
 Beds of stars. O Vale of Gods, the summery
 Sheen that flecks Earth's seas, and kisses its mountains,
 And fairly floods its plains, we know is of thee,—

A sign sent us from afar, that we may
Feebly learn how beautiful is Heaven!

The singer rested a moment ; then, looking in
the eyes of the king, with a rising voice, he con-
tinued, —

Richest hall in all the Vale is Quetzal's —

At that name Montezuma started. The min-
strel noted well the sign.

O none so fair as Quetzal's ! The winds that
Play among its silver columns are Love's
Light laughter, while of Love is all the air
About. From its orient porch the young
Mornings glean the glory with which they rise
On earth.

First God and fairest was Quetzal'.

As him O none so full of holiness,
And by none were men so lov'd ! Sat he always
In his hall, in deity roll'd, watching
Humanity, its genius, and its struggles
Upward. But most he watch'd its wars, — no hero
Fell but he call'd the wand'ring soul in love
To rest with him forever.

Sat he once

Thus watching, and where least expected, in
The far North, by stormy Winter rul'd, up
From the snows he saw a Nation rise. Shook
Their bolts, glistened their shields, flashed the
Light of their fierce eyes. A king, in wolf-skin
Girt, pointed Southward, and up the hills, through
The air, to the Sun, flew the name — Azatlan.
Then march'd they ; by day and night they march'd, — march'd
Ever South, across the desert, up the
Mountains, down the mountains ; leaping rivers,
Smiting foes, taking cities, — thus they march'd ;
Thus, a cloud of eagles, roll'd they from the
North ; thus on the South they fell, as autumn
Frosts upon the fruits of summer fall.

And now the priests were glad, — the singer sung of Heaven; and the warriors were aroused, — his voice was like a battle-cry, and the theme was the proud tradition of the conquering march of their fathers from the distant North. Sitting with clasped hands and drooped head, the king followed the chant, like one listening to an oracle. Yet stronger grew the minstrel's voice, —

Pass'd

Many years of toil, and still the Nation march'd;
Still Southward strode the king; still Sunward rose
The cry of *Azatlan! Azatlan!* And
Warmer, truer, brighter grew the human
Love of Quetzal'. He saw them reach a lake;
As dew its waves were clear; like lover's breath
The wind flew o'er it. 'T was in the clime of
Starry nights, — the clime of orange-groves and
Plumy palms.

Then Quetzal' from his watching
Rose. Aside he flung his sunly symbols.
Like a falling star, from the Vale of Gods
He dropp'd, like a falling star shot through the
Shoreless space; like a golden morning reach'd
The earth, — reach'd the lake. Then stay'd the Nation's
March. Still Sunward rose the cry, but Southward
Strode the king no more.

In his roomy heart, in
The chambers of its love, Quetzal' took the
Nation. He swore its kings should be his sons, —
They should conquer, by the Sun, he swore! In
The laughing Lake he bade them build; and up
Sprang Tenochtitlan, of the human love
Of Quetzal' child; up rose its fire-lit towers,
Outspread its piles, outstretched its streets
Of stone and wave. And as the city grew,
Still stronger grew the love of Quetzal'.

Thine

Is the Empire. To the shields again, O

Azatlan! 'T was thus he spoke; and feather'd
 Crest and oaken spear, the same that from the
 North came conquering, through the valley,
 On a wave of war went swiftly floating,
 Down before the flaming shields fell all the
 Neighb'ring tribes; open flew the cities' gates;
 Fighting kings gave up their crowns; from the hills
 The Chichimecan fled; on temple towers
 The Toltec fires to scattering ashes
 Died. Like a scourge upon the city, like
 A fire across the plain, like storms adown
 The mountain, — such was Azatlan that day
 It went to battle! Like a monarch 'mid
 His people, like a god amid the Heavens,
 O such was Azatlan, victor from the
 Battle, the Empire in its hand!

At this point the excitement of the audience
 rose into interruption: they clapped their hands
 and stamped; some shouted. As the strong
 voice rolled the grand story on, even the king's
 dread of the god disappeared; and had the 'tzin
 concluded then, the prize had certainly been his.
 But when the silence was restored, he resumed
 the attitude so proper to his disguise, and, sinking
 his voice and changing the measure of the chant,
 solemnly proceeded, —

As the river runneth ever, like the river ran the love of
 Quetzal'. The clime grew softer, and the Vale fairer. To
 weave, and trade,
 And sow, and build, he taught, with countless other ways of
 peace. He broke
 The seals of knowledge, and unveiled the mystic paths of wisdom;
 Gathered gold from the earth, and jewels from the streams; and
 happy
 Peace, as terrible in war, became Azatlan. Only one more
 Blessing, — a religion sounding of a quiet heaven and a
 Godly love, — this only wanted Azatlan. And, alas, for the
 Sunly Quetzal'! He built a temple, with a single tower, a
 Temple over many chambers."



Slowly thè 'tzin repeated the last sentence, and under his gaze the monarch's face changed visibly.

Worship he asked, and offerings,
 And sacrifices, not of captives, heart-broken and complaining,
 But of blooming flowers, and ripened fruits, emblems of love,
 and peace,
 And beauty. Alas, for the gentle Quetzal'! Cold grew the
 people
 Lov'd so well. A little while they worshiped ; then, as bees go
 no
 More to a withered flower, they forsook his shrine, and mock'd
 his
 Image. His love, longest lingering, went down at last, but
 slowly
 Went, as the brook, drop by drop, runs dry in the drought of a
 rainless
 Summer. Wrath 'rose instead. Down in a chamber below the
 temple,
 A chamber full of gold and unveiled splendor, beneath the
 Lake that
 Long had ceased its laughing, thither went the god, and on the
 walls,
 On the marble and the gold, he wrote —

The improvisation, if such it was, now wrought its full effect upon Montezuma, who saw the recital coming nearer and nearer to the dread mysteries of the golden chamber in the old Cû. At the beginning of the last sentence, the blood left his face, and he leaned forward as if to check the speech, at the same time some master influence held him wordless. His look was that of one seeing a vision. The vagaries of a mind shaken by days and nights of trouble are wonderful ; sometimes they are fearful. How easy for his distempered fancy to change the minstrel, with his white locks and venerable countenance, into a servant

of Quetzal', sent by the god to confirm the interpretation and prophecies of his other servant Mualox. At the last word, he arose, and, with an imperial gesture, cried, —

“Peace — enough !”

Then his utterance failed him, — another vision seemed to fix his gaze. The audience, thrilling with fear, turned to see what he saw, and heard a commotion, which, from the further end of the hall, drew slowly near the throne, and ceased not until Mualox, in his sacrificial robes, knelt upon the step in the minstrel's place. Montezuma dropped into his throne, and, covering his eyes with his hands, said faintly, —

“Evil betides me, father, evil betides me ! But I am a king. Speak what you can !”

Mualox prostrated himself until his white hair covered his master's feet.

“Again, O king, your servant comes speaking for his god.”

“For the god, Mualox ?”

The hall became silent as a tomb.

“I come,” the holy man continued, “to tell the king that Quetzal' has landed, this time on the seashore in Cempoalla. At set of sun his power was collected on the beach. Summon all your wisdom, — the end is at hand.”

All present and hearing listened awe-struck. Of the warriors, not one, however battle-tried, but trembled with undefined terror. And who may accuse them ? The weakness was from fear of a supposed god ; their heathen souls, after the man-

ner of the Christian, asked, Who may war against Heaven ?

“ Rise, Mualox ! You love me ; I have no better servant,” said the king with dignity, but so sadly that even the prophet’s heart was touched. “ It is not for me to say if your news be good or evil. All things, even my Empire, are in the care of the gods. To-morrow I will hold a council to determine how this visit may be best met.” With a mighty effort he freed his spirit of the influence of the untimely visitation, and said, with a show of unconcern, “ Leave the morrow to whom it belongs, my children. Let us now to the ceremony which was to crown the night. Come forward, son of ‘Hualpilli ! Room for the lord Iztlil’, my friends !”

Tula looked down, and the queen Tecalco bowed her face upon the shoulder of the queen Acatlan ; and immediately, all differences lost in loving loyalty, the caciques and chiefs gathered before him, — a nobility as true and chivalric as ever fought beneath an infidel banner.

And they waited, but the Tezcucan came not.

“ Go, Maxtla. Seek the lord Iztlil’, and bring him to my presence.”

Through the palace and through the gardens they sought the recreant lover. And the silence of the waiting in the great hall was painful. Guest looked in the face of guest, mute, yet asking much. The prince Cacama whispered to the prince Cuitlahua, “ It is a happy interference of the gods !”

Tecalco wept on, but not from sorrow, and the eyes of the devoted princess were lustrous for the first time ; hope had come back to the darkened soul.

And the monarch said little, and ere long retired. A great portion of the company, despite his injunction, speedily followed his example, leaving the younger guests, with what humor they could command, to continue the revel till morning.

Next day at noon couriers from Cempoalla confirmed the announcement of Mualox. Cortes had indeed landed ; and that Good Friday was the last of the perfect glory of Anahuac.

Poor king ! Not long now until I may sing for thee the lamentation of the Gothic Roderick, whose story is but little less melancholy than thine.

“ He look'd for the brave captains that led the hosts of Spain,
But all were fled, except the dead, — and who could count the
slain ?

Where'er his eye could wander all bloody was the plain ;
And while thus he said the tears he shed ran down his cheeks
like rain.

“ Last night I was the king of Spain : to-day no king am I.
Last night fair castles held my train : to-night where shall I
lie ?

Last night a hundred pages did serve me on the knee,
To-night not one I call my own, — not one pertains to me.”¹

¹ The fifth and sixth verses of the famous Spanish ballad, “The Lamentation of Don Roderic.” The translation I have borrowed from Lockhart's Spanish Ballads. — TR.



BOOK THREE





I

THE FIRST COMBAT



HE 'tzin's companion the night of the banquet, as the reader has no doubt anticipated, was Hualpa, the Tihuanacan. To an adventure of his, more luckless than his friend's, I now turn.

It will be remembered that the 'tzin left him at the door of the great hall. In a strange scene, without a guide, it was natural for him to be ill at ease; light-hearted and fearless, however, he strolled leisurely about, at one place stopping to hear a minstrel, at another to observe a dance, and all the time half confused by the maze and splendor of all he beheld. In such awe stood he of the monarch, that he gave the throne a wide margin, contented from a distance to view the accustomed interchanges of courtesy between the guests and their master. Finding, at last,

that he could not break through the bashfulness acquired in his solitary life among the hills, and imitate the ease and nonchalance of those born, as it were, to the lordliness of the hour, he left the house, and once more sought the retiracy of the gardens. Out of doors, beneath the stars, with the fresh air in his nostrils, he felt at home again, the whilom hunter, ready for any emprise.

As to the walk he should follow he had no choice, for in every direction he heard laughter, music, and conversation ; everywhere were flowers and the glow of lamps. Merest chance put him in a path that led to the neighborhood of the museum.

Since the night shut in, — be it said in a whisper, — a memory of wonderful brightness had taken possession of his mind. Nenetzin's face as he saw it laughing in the door of the kiosk when Yeteve called the 'tzin for a song, he thought outshone the lamplight, the flowers, and everything most beautiful about his path ; her eyes were as stars, rivaling the insensate ones in the mead above him. He remembered them, too, as all the brighter for the tears through which they had looked down, — alas ! not on him, but upon his reverend comrade. If Hualpa was not in love, he was, at least, borrowing wings for a flight of that kind.

Indulging the delicious revery, he came upon some nobles, conversing, and quite blocking up the way, though going in his direction. He hesitated ; but, considering that, as a guest, the

freedom of the garden belonged equally to him, he proceeded, and became a listener.

“People call him a warrior. They know nothing of what makes a warrior; they mistake good fortune, or what the traders in the *tiangués* call luck, for skill. Take his conduct at the combat of Quetzal’ as an example; say he threw his arrows well: yet it was a cowardly war. How much braver to grasp the *maquahuitl*, and rush to blows! That requires manhood, strength, skill. To stand back, and kill with a chance arrow,—a woman could do as much.”

The ’tzin was the subject of discussion, and the voice that of Iztzil’, the Tezcucan. Hualpa moved closer to the party.

“I thought his course in that combat good,” said a stranger; “it gave him opportunities not otherwise to be had. That he did not join the assault cannot be urged against his courage. Had you, my lord Iztzil’, fallen like the Otompan, he would have been left alone to fight the challengers. A fool would have seen the risk; a coward would not have courted it.”

“That argument,” replied Iztzil’, “is crediting him with too much shrewdness. By the gods, he never doubted the result,—not he! He knew the Tlascalans would never pass my shield; he knew the victory was mine, two against me as there were. A prince of Tezcuco was never conquered!”

The spirit of the hunter was fast rising; yet he followed, listening.

“And, my friends,” the Tezcucan continued, “who better judged the conduct of the combatants that day than the king? See the result. To-night I take from the faint heart his bride, the woman he has loved from boyhood. Then this banquet. In whose honor is it? What does it celebrate? There is a prize to be awarded, — the prize of courage and skill; and who gets it? And further, of the nobles and chiefs of the valley, but one is absent, — he whose prudence exceeds his valor.”

In such strain the Tezcucan proceeded. And Hualpa, fully aroused, pushed through the company to the speaker, but so quietly that those who observed him asked no questions. Assured that the 'tzin must have friends present, he waited for some one to take up his cause. His own impulse was restrained by his great dread of the king, whose gardens he knew were not fighting-grounds at any time or in any quarrel. But, as the boastful prince continued, the resolve to punish him took definite form with the Tihuanacan, — to such degree had his admiration for the 'tzin already risen! Gradually the auditors dropped behind or disappeared; finally but one remained, — a middle-aged, portly noble, whose demeanor was not of the kind to shake the resolution taken.

Hualpa made his first advance close by the eastern gate of the garden, to which point he held himself in check lest the want of arms should prove an apology for refusing the fight.

“Will the lord Iztlil' stop?” he said, laying his hand on the Tezcucan's arm.

"I do not know you," was the answer.

The sleek courtier also stopped, and stared broadly.

"You do not know me! I will mend my fortune in that respect," returned the hunter, mildly. "I have heard what you said so ungraciously of my friend and comrade," — the last word he emphasized strongly, — "Guatamozin." Then he repeated the offensive words as correctly as if he had been a practised herald, and concluded, "Now, you know the 'tzin cannot be here to-night; you also know the reason; but, for him and in his place, I say, prince though you are, you have basely slandered an absent enemy."

"Who are you?" asked the Tezcucan, surprised.

"The comrade of Guatamozin, here to take up his quarrel."

"You challenge me?" said Iztlil', in disdain.

"Does a prince of Tezcucan, son of 'Hualpilli, require a blow? Take it then."

The blow was given.

"See! Do I not bring you princely blood?" And, in his turn, Hualpa laughed scornfully.

The Tezcucan was almost choked with rage. "This to me, — to me, — a prince and warrior!" he cried.

A danger not considered by the rash hunter now offered itself. An outcry would bring down the guard; and, in the event of his arrest, the united representations of Iztlil' and his friend would be sufficient to have him sent forthwith

to the tigers. The pride of the prince saved him.

“Have a care, — ’t is an assassin! I will call the guard at the gate!” said the courtier, alarmed.

“Call them not, call them not! I am equal to my own revenge. Oh, for a spear or knife, — anything to kill!”

“Will you hear me, — a word?” the hunter said. “I am without arms also; but they can be had.”

“The arms, the arms!” cried Iztlil’ passionately.

“We can make the sentinels at the gate clever by a few quills of gold; and here are enough to satisfy them.” Hualpa produced a handful of the money. “Let us try them. Outside the gate the street is clear.”

The courtier protested, but the prince was determined.

“The arms! Pledge my province and palaces, — everything for a *maquahuil* now.”

They went to the gate and obtained the use of two of the weapons and as many shields. Then the party passed into the street, which they found deserted. To avoid the great thoroughfare to Iztapalapan, they turned to the north, and kept on as far as the corner of the garden wall.

“Stay we here,” said the courtier. “Short time is all you want, lord Iztlil’. The feathers on the hawk’s wings are not full-fledged.”

The man spoke confidently; and it must be confessed that the Tezcucan’s reputation and experience justified the assurance. One advantage

the hunter had which his enemies both overlooked, — a surpassing composure. From a temple near by, a red light flared broadly over the place, redeeming it from what would otherwise have been vague starlight ; by its aid they might have seen his countenance without a trace of excitement or passion. One wish, and but one, he had, — that Guatamozin could witness the trial.

The impatience of the Tezcucan permitted but few preliminaries.

“The gods of Mictlan require no prayers. Stand out !” he said.

“Strike !” answered Hualpa.

Up rose the glassy blades of the Tezcucan, flashing in the light ; quick and strong the blow, yet it clove but the empty air. “For the 'tzin !” shouted the hunter, striking back before the other was half recovered. The shield was dashed aside ; a groan acknowledged a wound in the breast, and Iztzil' staggered ; another blow stretched him on the pavement. A stream of blood, black in the night, stole slowly out over the flags. The fight was over. The victor dropped the bladed end of his weapon, and surveyed his foe with astonishment, then pity.

“Your friend is hurt ; help him !” he said, turning to the courtier ; but he was alone, — the craven had run. For one fresh from the hills, this was indeed a dilemma ! A duel and a death in sight of the royal palace ! A chill tingled through his veins. He thought rapidly of the alarm, the arrest, the king's wrath, and himself

given to glut the monsters in the menagerie. Up rose, also, the many-fastnesses amid the cedared glades of Tihuanco. Could he but reach them! The slaves of Montezuma, to please a whim, might pursue and capture a quail or an eagle; but there he could laugh at pursuit, while in Tenochtitlan he was nowhere safe.

Sight of the flowing blood brought him out of the panic. He raised the Tezcucan's arm, and tore the rich vestments from his breast. The wound was a glancing one; it might not be fatal after all; to save him were worth the trial. Taking off his own *maxtlatl*, he wound it tightly round the body and over the cut. Across the street there was a small, open house; lifting the wounded man gently as possible, he carried him thither, and laid him in a darkened passage. Where else to convey him he knew not; that was all he could do. Now for flight, — for Tihuanco. Tireless and swift of foot shall they be who catch him on the way!

He started for the lake, intending to cross in a canoe rather than by the causeway; already a square was put behind, when it occurred to him that the Tezcucan might have slaves and a palanquin waiting before the palace door. He began, also, to reproach himself for the baseness of the desertion. How would the 'tzin have acted? When the same Tezcucan lay with the dead in the arena, who nursed him back to life?

If Hualpa had wished his patron's presence at the beginning of the combat, now, flying from im-



aginary dangers, — flying, like a startled coward, from his very victory, — much did he thank the gods that he was alone and unseen. In a kind of alcove, or resting-place for weary walkers, with which, by the way, the thoroughfares of Tenochtitlan were well provided, he sat down, recalled his wonted courage, and determined on a course more manly, whatever the risk.

Then he retraced his steps, and went boldly to the portal of the palace, where he found the Tezcucan's palanquin. The slaves in charge followed him without objection.

"Take your master to his own palace. Be quick!" he said to them, when the wounded man was transferred to the carriage.

"It is in Tecuba," said one of them.

"To Tecuba then."

He did more; he accompanied the slaves. Along the street, across the causeway, which never seemed of such weary length, they proceeded. On the road the Tezcucan revived. He said little, and was passive in his enemy's hands. From Tecuba the latter hastened back to Tenochtitlan, and reached the portico of Xoli, the Chalcan, just as day broke over the valley.

And such was the hunter's first emprise as a warrior.



II

THE SECOND COMBAT



It is hardly worth while to detail the debate between Hualpa and Xoli; enough to know that the latter, anticipating pursuit, hid the son of his friend in a closet attached to his restaurant.

That day, and many others, the police went up and down, ferreting for the assassin of the noble Iztliil'. Few premises escaped their search. The Chalcan's, amongst others, was examined, but without discovery. Thus safely concealed, the hunter throve on the *cuisine*, and for the loss of

liberty was consoled by the gossip and wordy wisdom of his accessory, and, by what was better, the gratitude of Guatamozin. In such manner two weeks passed away, the longest and most wearisome of his existence. How sick at heart he grew in his luxurious imprisonment; how he pined for the old hills and woodlands; how he longed once more to go down the shaded vales free-footed and fearless, stalking deer or following his ocelot. Ah, what is ambition gratified to freedom lost!

Unused to the confinement, it became irksome to him, and at length intolerable. "When," he asked himself, "is this to end? Will the king ever withdraw his huntsmen? Through whom am I to look or hope for pardon?" He sighed, paced the narrow closet, and determined that night to walk out and see if his old friends the stars were still in their places, and take a draught of the fresh air, to his remembrance sweeter than the new beverage of the Chalcan. And when the night came he was true to his resolution.

Pass we his impatience while waiting an opportunity to leave the house unobserved; his attempts unsuccessfully repeated; his vexation at the "noble patrons" who lounged in the apartments and talked so long over their goblets. At a late hour he made good his exit. In the *tian-guez*, which was the first to receive him, booths and porticoes were closed for the night; lights were everywhere extinguished, except on the towers of the temples. As morning would end

his furlough and drive him back to the hated captivity, he resolved to make the most of the night; he would visit the lake, he would stroll through the streets. By the gods! he would play freeman to the full.

In his situation, all places were alike perilous, — houses, streets, temples, and palaces. As for that reason one direction was good as another, he started up the Iztapalapan street from the *tianguetz*. Passengers met him now and then; otherwise the great thoroughfare was unusually quiet. Sauntering along in excellent imitation of careless enjoyment, he strove to feel cheerful; but, in spite of his efforts, he became lonesome, while his dread of the patrols kept him uneasy. Such freedom, he ascertained, was not all his fancy colored it; yet it was not so bad as his prison. On he went. Sometimes on a step, or in the shade of a portico, he would sit and gaze at the houses as if they were old friends basking in the moonlight; at the bridges he would also stop, and, leaning over the balustrades, watch the waveless water in the canal below, and envy the watermen asleep in their open canoes. The result was a feeling of recklessness, sharpened by a yearning for something to do, some place to visit, some person to see; in short, a thousand wishes, so vague, however, that they amounted to nothing.

In this mood he thought of Nenetzin, who, in the tedium of his imprisonment, had become to him a constant dream, — a vision by which his fancy was amused and his impatience soothed;

a vision that faded not with the morning, but at noon was sweet as at night. With the thought came another, — the idea of an adventure excusable only in a lover.

“The garden !” he said, stopping and thinking. “The garden ! It is the king’s ; so is the street. It is guarded ; so is the city. I will be in danger ; but that is around me everywhere. By the gods ! I will go to the garden, and look at the house in which she sleeps.”

Invade the gardens of the great king at midnight ! The project would have terrified the Chalcan ; the 'tzin would have forbade it ; at any other time, the adventurer himself would rather have gone unarmed into the den of a tiger. The gardens were chosen places sacred to royalty ; otherwise they would have been without walls and without sentinels at the gates. In the event of detection and arrest, the intrusion at such a time would be without excuse ; death was the penalty.

But the venture was agreeable to the mood he was in ; he welcomed it as a relief from loneliness, as a rescue from his tormenting void of purpose ; if he saw the dangers, they were viewed in the charm of his gentle passion, — griffins and goblins masked by Love, the enchanter. He started at once ; and now that he had an object before him, there was no more loitering under porticoes or on the bridges. As the squares were put behind him, he repeated over and over, as a magical exorcism, “I will look at the house

in which she sleeps,—the house in which she sleeps.”

Once in his progress, he turned aside from the great street, and went up a footway bordering a canal. At the next street, however, he crossed a bridge, and proceeded to the north again. Almost before he was aware of it, he reached the corner of the royal garden, always to be remembered by him as the place of his combat with the Tezcucan. But so intent was he upon his present project he scarcely gave it a second look.

The wall was but little higher than his head, and covered with snowy stucco; and where, over the coping, motionless in the moonshine, a palm-tree lifted its graceful head, he boldly climbed, and entered the sacred enclosure. Drawing his mantle close about him, he stole toward the palace, selecting the narrow walks most protected by overhanging shrubbery.

A man's instinct is a good counselor in danger; often it is the only counselor. Gliding through the shadows, cautiously as if hunting, he seemed to hear a recurrent whisper,—

“Have a care, O hunter! This is not one of thy familiar places. The gardens of the great king have other guardians than the stars. Death awaits thee at every gate.”

But as often came the reply, “Nenetzin,—I will see the house in which she sleeps.”

He held on toward the palace, never stopping until the top, here and there crowned with low turrets, rose above the highest trees. Then he

listened intently, but heard not a sound of life from the princely pile. He sought next a retreat, where, secure from observation, he might sit in the pleasant air, and give wings to his lover's fancy. At last he found one, a little retired from the central walk, and not far from a tank, which had once been, if it were not now, the basin of a fountain. Upon a bench, well shaded by a clump of flowering bushes, he stretched himself at ease, and was soon absorbed.

The course of his thought, in keeping with his youth, was to the future. Most of the time, however, he had no distinct idea; revery, like an evening mist, settled upon him. Sometimes he lay with closed eyes, shutting himself in, as it were, from the world; then he stared vacantly at the stars, or into those blue places in the mighty vault too deep for stars; but most he loved to look at the white walls of the palace. And for the time he was happy; his soul may be said to have been singing a silent song to the unconscious Nenetzin.

Once or twice he was disturbed by a noise, like the suppressed cry of a child; but he attributed it to some of the restless animals in the museum at the farther side of the garden. Half the night was gone; so the watchers on the temples proclaimed; and still he stayed, — still dreamed.

About that time, however, he was startled by footsteps coming apparently from the palace. He sat up, ready for action. The appearance of a man alone and unarmed allayed his apprehension

for the moment. Up the walk, directly by the hiding-place, the stranger came. As he passed slowly on, the intruder thrilled at beholding, not a guard or an officer, but Montezuma in person! As far as the tank the monarch walked; there he stopped, put his hands behind him, and looked moodily down into the pool.

Garden, palace, Nenetzin, — everything but the motionless figure by the tank faded from Hualpa's mind. Fear came upon him; and no wonder: there, almost within reach, at midnight, unattended, stood what was to him the positive realization of power, ruler of the Empire, dispenser of richest gifts, keeper of life and death! Guilty, and tremulously apprehensive that he had been discovered, Hualpa looked each instant to be dragged from his hiding.

The space around the tank was clear, and strewn with shells perfectly white in the moonlight. While the adventurer sat fixed to his seat, watching the king, watching, also, a chance of escape, he saw something come from the shrubbery, move stealthily out into the walk, then crouch down. Now, as I have shown, he was brave; but this tested all his courage. Out further crept the object, moving with the stillness of a spirit. Scarcely could he persuade himself at first that it was not an illusion begotten of his fears; but its form and movements, the very stillness of its advance, at last identified it. In all his hunter's experience, he had never seen an ocelot so large. The screams he had heard were now

explained, — the monster had escaped from the menagerie!

I cannot say the recognition wrought a subsidence of Hualpa's fears. He felt instinctively for his arms, — he had nothing but a knife of brittle *itzli*. Then he thought of the stories he had heard of the ferocity of the royal tigers, and of unhappy wretches flung, by way of punishment, into their dens. He shuddered, and turned to the king, who still gazed thoughtfully over the wall of the tank.

Holy Huitzil! the ocelot was creeping upon the monarch! The flash of understanding that revealed the fact to Hualpa was like the lightning. Breathlessly he noticed the course the brute was taking; there could be no doubt. Another flash, and he understood the monarch's peril, — alone, unarmed, before the guards at the gates or in the palace could come, the struggle would be over; child of the Sun though he was, there remained for him but one hope of rescue.

As, in common with provincials generally, he cherished a reverence for the monarch hardly secondary to that he felt for the gods, the Tihuacan was inexpressibly shocked to see him subject to such a danger. An impulse aside from native chivalry urged him to confront the ocelot; but under the circumstances, — and he recounted them rapidly, — he feared the king more than the brute. Brief time was there for consideration; each moment the peril increased. He thought of the 'tzin, then of Nenetzin.

“Now or never!” he said. “If the gods do but help me, I will prove myself!”

And he unlooped the mantle, and wound it about his left arm; the knife, poor as it was, he took from his *maxtlatl*; then he was ready. Ah, if he only had a javelin!

To place himself between the king and his enemy was what he next set about. Experience had taught him how much such animals are governed by curiosity, and upon that he proceeded to act. On his hands and knees he crept out into the walk. The moment he became exposed, the ocelot stopped, raised its round head, and watched him with a gaze as intent as his own. The advance was slow and stealthy; when the point was almost gained, the king turned about.

“Speak not, stir not, O king!” he cried, without stopping. “I will save you, — no other can.”

From creeping man the monarch looked to crouching beast, and comprehended the situation.

Forward went Hualpa, now the chief object of attraction to the monster. At last he was directly in front of it.

“Call the guard and fly! It is coming now!”

And through the garden rang the call. Verily, the hunter had become the king!

A moment after the ocelot lowered its head, and leaped. The Tihuanacan had barely time to put himself in posture to receive the attack, his left arm serving as shield; upon his knee, he struck with the knife. The blood flew, and there was a howl so loud that the shouts of the monarch

were drowned. The mantle was rent to ribbons; and through the feathers, cloth, and flesh, the long fangs crouched to the bone, — but not without return. This time the knife, better directed, was driven to the heart, where it snapped short off, and remained. The clenched jaws relaxed. Rushing suddenly in, Hualpa contrived to push the fainting brute into the tank. He saw it sink, saw the pool subside to its calm, then turned to Montezuma, who, though calling lustily for the guard, had stayed to the end. Kneeling upon the stained shells, he laid the broken knife at the monarch's feet, and waited for him to speak.

“Arise!” the king said kindly.

The hunter stood up, splashed with blood, the fragments of his *tilmatli* clinging in shreds to his arm, his tunic torn, the hair fallen over his face, — a most uncourtierlike figure.

“You are hurt,” said the king directly. “I was once thought skillful with medicines. Let me see.”

He found the wounds, and untying his own sash, rich with embroidery, wrapped it in many folds around the bleeding arm.

Meantime there was commotion in many quarters.

“Evil take the careless watchers!” he said sternly, noticing the rising clamor. “Had I trusted them, — but are you not of the guard?”

“I am the great king's slave, — his poorest slave, but not of his guard.”

Montezuma regarded him attentively.

"It cannot be; an assassin would not have interfered with the ocelot. Take up the knife, and follow me."

Hualpa obeyed. On the way they met a number of the guard running in great perplexity; but without a word to them, the monarch walked on, and into the palace. In a room where there were tables and seats, books and writing materials, maps on the walls and piles of them on the floor, he stopped, and seated himself.

"You know what truth is, and how the gods punish falsehood," he began; then, abruptly, "How came you in the garden?"

Hualpa fell on his knees, laid his palm on the floor, and answered without looking up, for such he knew to be a courtly custom.

"Who may deceive the wise king Montezuma? I will answer as to the gods: the gardens are famous in song and story, and I was tempted to see them, and climbed the wall. When you came to the fountain, I was close by; and while waiting a chance to escape, I saw the ocelot creeping upon you; and—and—the great king is too generous to deny his slave the pardon he risked his life for."

"Who are you?"

"I am from the province of Tihuanco. My name is Hualpa."

"Hualpa, Hualpa," repeated the king slowly. "You serve Guatamozin."

"He is my friend and master, O king."

Montezuma started. "Holy gods, what mad-

ness ! My people have sought you far and wide to feed you to the tiger in the tank."

Hualpa faltered not.

"O king, I know I am charged with the murder of Iztlil', the Tezcucan. Will it please you to hear my story?"

And taking the assent, he gave the particulars of the combat, not omitting the cause. "I did not murder him," he concluded. "If he is dead, I slew him in fair fight, shield to shield, as a warrior may, with honor, slay a foeman."

"And you carried him to Tecuba?"

"Before the judges, if you choose, I will make the account good."

"Be it so!" the monarch said emphatically. "Two days hence, in the court, I will accuse you. Have there your witnesses : it is a matter of life and death. Now, what of your master, the 'tzin?"

The question was dangerous, and Hualpa trembled, but resolved to be bold.

"If it be not too presumptuous, most mighty king, — if a slave may seem to judge his master's judgment by the offer of a word" —

"Speak ! I give you liberty."

"I wish to say," continued Hualpa, "that in the court there are many noble courtiers who would die for you, O king ; but, of them all, there is not one who so loves you, or whose love could be made so profitable, being backed by skill, courage, and wisdom, as the generous prince whom you call my master. In his banishment he has chosen to serve you ; for the night the stran-

gers landed in Cempoalla, he left his palace in Iztapalapan, and entered their camp in the train of the governor of Cotastlan. Yesterday a courier, whom you rewarded richly for his speed in coming, brought you portraits of the strangers, and pictures of their arms and camp; that courier was Guatamozin, and his was the hand that wrought the artist's work. Oh, much as your faculties become a king, you have been deceived; he is not a traitor."

"Who told you such a fine minstrel's tale?"

"The gods judge me, O king, if, without your leave, I had so much as dared kiss the dust at your feet. What you have graciously permitted me to tell I heard from the 'tzin himself."

Montezuma sat a long time silent, then asked, "Did your master speak of the strangers, or of the things he saw?"

"The noble 'tzin regards me kindly, and therefore spoke with freedom. He said, mourning much that he could not be at your last council to declare his opinion, that you were mistaken."

The speaker's face was cast down, so that he could not see the frown with which the plain words were received, and he continued, —

"They are not *teules*,¹ so the 'tzin said, 'but men, as you and I are; they eat, sleep, drink, like us; nor is that all, — they die like us; for in the night,' he said, 'I was in their camp, and saw them, by torchlight, bury the body of one that day dead.' And then he asked, 'Is that a prac-

¹ Gods.

tice among the gods?' Your slave, O king, is not learned as a paba, and therefore believed him."

Montezuma stood up.

"Not *teules!* How thinks he they should be dealt with?"

"He says that, as they are men, they are also invaders, with whom an Aztec cannot treat. Nothing for them but war!"

To and fro the monarch walked. After which he returned to Hualpa and said, —

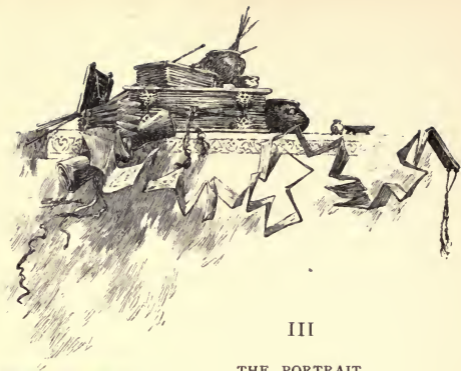
"Go home now. To-morrow I will send you a *tilmatti* for the one you wear. Look to your wounds, and recollect the trial. As you love life, have there your proof. I will be your accuser."

"As the great king is merciful to his children, the gods will be merciful to him. I will give myself to the guards," said the hunter, to whom anything was preferable to the closet in the restaurant.

"No, you are free."

Hualpa kissed the floor, and arose, and hurried from the palace to the house of Xoli on the *tian-guez*. The effect of his appearance upon that worthy, and the effect of the story afterwards, may be imagined. Attention to the wounds, a bath, and sound slumber put the adventurer in a better condition by the next noon.

And from that night he thought more than ever of glory and Nenetzin.



III

THE PORTRAIT

NEXT day, after the removal of the noon comfitures, and when the princess Tula had gone to the hammock for the usual *siesta*, Nenetzin rushed into her apartment unusually excited.

“Oh, I have something so strange to tell you,—something so strange!” she cried, throwing herself upon the hammock.

Her face was bright and very beautiful. Tula looked at her a moment, then put her lips lovingly to the smooth forehead.

“By the Sun! as our royal father sometimes swears, my sister seems in earnest.”

“Indeed I am; and you will go with me, will you not?”

“Ah! you want to take me to the garden to see the dead tiger, or, perhaps, the warrior who

slew it, or — now I have it — you have seen another minstrel.”

Tula expected the girl to laugh, but was surprised to see her eyes fill with tears. She changed her manner instantly, and bade the slave who had been sitting by the hammock, fanning her, to retire. Then she said, —

“You jest so much, Nenetzin, that I do not know when you are serious. I love you : now tell me what has happened.”

The answer was given in a low voice.

“You will think me foolish, and so I am, but I cannot help it. Do you recollect the dream I told you the night on the *chinampa* ?”

“The night Yeteve came to us? I recollect.”

“You know I saw a man come and sit down in our father’s palace, — a stranger with blue eyes and fair face, and hair and beard like the silk of the ripening maize. I told you I loved him, and would have none but him ; and you laughed at me, and said he was the god Quetzal’. Oh, Tula, the dream has come back to me many times since ; so often that it seems, when I am awake, to have been a reality. I am childish, you think, and very weak ; you may even pity me ; but I have grown to look upon the blue-eyed as something lovable and great, and thought of him is a part of my mind ; so much so that it is useless for me to say he is not, or that I am loving a shadow. And now, O dear Tula, now comes the strange part of my story. Yesterday, you know, a courier from Cempoalla brought our

father some pictures of the strangers lately landed from the sea. This morning I heard there were portraits among them, and could not resist a curiosity to see them; so I went, and almost the first one I came to, — do not laugh, — almost the first one I came to was the picture of him who comes to me so often in my dreams. I looked and trembled. There indeed he was; there were the blue eyes, the yellow hair, the white face, even the dress, shining as silver, and the plumed crest. I did not stay to look at anything else, but hurried here, scarcely knowing whether to be glad or afraid. I thought if you went with me I would not be afraid. Go you must; we will look at the portrait together.” And she hid her face, sobbing like a child.

“It is too wonderful for belief. I will go,” said Tula.

She arose, and the slave brought and threw over her shoulders the long white scarf so invariably a part of an Aztec woman’s costume. Then the sisters took their way to the chamber where the pictures were kept, — the same into which Hualpa had been led the night before. The king was elsewhere giving audience, and his clerks and attendants were with him. So the two were allowed to indulge their curiosity undisturbed.

Nenetzin went to a pile of manuscripts lying on the floor. The elder sister was startled by the first picture exposed; for she recognized the handiwork, long since familiar to her, of the ’tzin. Nor was she less surprised by the subject, which

was a horse, apparently a nobler instrument for a god's revenge than man himself.

Next she saw pictured a horse, its rider mounted, and in Christian armor, and bearing shield, lance, and sword. Then came a cannon, the gunner by the carriage, his match lighted, while a volume of flame and smoke was bursting from the throat of the piece. A portrait followed; she lifted it up, and trembled to see the hero of Nenetzin's dream!

"Did I not tell you so, O Tula?" said the girl in a whisper.

"The face is pleasant and noble," the other answered thoughtfully; "but I am afraid. There is evil in the smile, evil in the blue eyes."

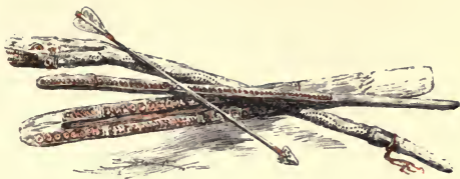
The rest of the manuscripts they left untouched. The one absorbed them; but with what different feelings! Nenetzin was a-flutter with pleasure, restrained by awe. Impressed by the singularity of the vision, as thus realized, a passionate wish to see the man or god, whichever he was, and hear his voice, may be called her nearest semblance to reflection. Like a lover in the presence of the beloved, she was glad and contented, and asked nothing of the future. But with Tula, older and wiser, it was different. She was conscious of the novelty of the incident; at the same time a presentiment, a gloomy foreboding, filled her soul. In slumber we sometimes see spectres, and they sit by us and smile; yet we shrink, and cannot keep down anticipations of ill. So Tula was affected by what she beheld.

She laid the portrait softly down, and turned to Nenetzin, who had now no need to deprecate her laugh.

“The ways of the gods are most strange. Something tells me this is their work. I am afraid; let us go.”

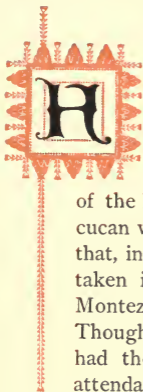
And they retired, and the rest of the day, swinging in the hammock, they talked of the dream and the portrait, and wondered what would come of them.





IV

THE TRIAL



UALPA'S adventure in the garden made a great stir in the palace and the city. Profound was the astonishment, therefore, when it became known that the savior of the king and the murderer of the Tezucan were one and the same person, and that, in the latter character, he was to be taken into court and tried for his life, Montezuma himself acting as accuser. Though universally discredited, the story had the effect of drawing an immense attendance at the trial.

“Ho, Chalcan! Fly not your friends in that way!”

So the broker was saluted by some men nobly dressed, whom he was about passing on the great street. He stopped, and bowed very low.

“A pleasant day, my lords! Your invitation honors me; the will of his patrons should always be law to the poor keeper of a portico. I am hurrying to the trial.”

"Then stay with us. We also have a curiosity to see the assassin."

"My good lord speaks harshly. The boy, whom I love as a son, cannot be what you call him."

The noble laughed. "Take it not ill, Chalcan. So much do I honor the hand that slew the base Tezcucan that I care not whether it was in fair fight or by vantage taken. But what do you know about the king being accuser to-day?"

"So he told the boy."

"Incredible!"

"I will not quarrel with my lord on that account," rejoined the broker. "A more generous master than Montezuma never lived. Are not the people always complaining of his liberality? At the last banquet, for inventing a simple drink, did he not give me, his humblest slave, a goblet fit for another king?"

"And what is your drink, though ever so excellent, to the saving his life? Is not that your argument, Chalcan?"

"Yes, my lord, and at such peril! Ah, you should have seen the ocelot when taken from the tank! The keepers told me it was the largest and fiercest in the museum."

Then Xoli proceeded to edify his noble audience with all the gossip pertaining to the adventure; and as his object was to take into court some friends for the luckless hunter more influential than himself, he succeeded admirably. Every few steps there were such expressions as, "It

would be pitiful if so brave a fellow should die!" "If I were king, by the Sun, I would enrich him from the possessions of the Tezcucan!" And as they showed no disposition to interrupt him, his pleading lasted to the house of justice, where the company arrived not any too soon to procure comfortable seats.

The courthouse stood at the left of the street, a little retired from the regular line of buildings. The visitors had first to pass through a spacious hall, which brought them to a courtyard cemented under foot, and on all sides bounded with beautiful houses. Then, on the right, they saw the entrance to the chamber of justice, grotesquely called the Tribunal of God,¹ in which, for ages, had been administered a code, vindictive, but not without equity. The great door was richly carved; the windows high and broad, and lined with fluted marble; while a projecting cornice, tastefully finished, gave airiness and beauty to the venerable structure.

The party entered the room with profoundest reverence. On a dais sat the judge; in front of him was the stool bearing the skull with the emerald crown and gay plumes. Turning from the plain tapestry along the walls, the spectators failed not to admire the jewels that blazed with almost starry splendor from the centre of the canopy above him.

The broker, not being of the class of privileged nobles, found a seat with difficulty. To his com-

¹ Prescott, *Cong. of Mexico*, vol. i., p. 33.

fort, however, he was placed by the side of an acquaintance.

“You should have come earlier, Chalcan; the judge has twice used the arrow this morning.”

“Indeed!”

“Once against a boy too much given to *pulque*, — a drunkard. With the other doubtless you were acquainted.”

“Was he noble?”

“He had good blood, at least, being the son of a Tetzmellocan, who died immensely rich. The witnesses said the fellow squandered his father’s estate almost as soon as it came to him.”

“Better had he been born a thief,”¹ said Xoli coolly.

Suddenly, four heralds, with silver maces, entered the court-room, announcing the monarch. The people fell upon their knees, and so remained until he was seated before the dais. Then they arose, and, with staring eyes, devoured the beauty of his costume, and the mysterious sanction of manner, office, power, and custom, which the lovers of royalty throughout the world have delighted to sum up in the one word, — majesty. The hum of voices filled the chamber. Then, by another door, in charge of officers, Hualpa appeared, and was led to the dais opposite the king. Before an Aztec court there was no ceremony. The highest and the lowliest stood upon a level: such, at least, was the beautiful theory.

¹ A thief might be punished with slavery: death was the penalty for prodigalism and drunkenness.

So intense was the curiosity to see the prisoner that the spectators pressed upon each other, for the moment mindless of the monarch's presence.

"A handsome fellow!" said an old cacique approvingly.

"Only a boy, my lord!" suggested the critic.

"And not fierce-looking, either."

"Yes" —

"No" —

"He might kill, but in fair fight: so I judge him."

And that became the opinion amongst the nobles.

"Your friend seems confident, Xoli. I like him," remarked the Chalcan's acquaintance.

"Hush! The king accuses."

"The king, said you!" And the good man, representing the commonalty, was frozen into silence.

In another quarter, one asked, "Does he not wear the 'tzin's livery?"

The person interrogated covered his mouth with both hands, then drew to the other's ear, and whispered, —

"Yes, he's a 'tzin's man, and that, they say, is his crime."

The sharp voice of the executive officer of the court rang out, and there was stillness almost breathless. Up rose the clerk, a learned man, keeper of the records, and read the indictment; that done, he laid the portrait of the accused on the table before the judge; then the trial began.

The judge, playing carelessly with the fatal arrow, said, — "Hualpa, son of Tepaja, the Tihuancan, stand up, and answer."

And the prisoner arose, and saluted court and king, and answered, "It is true, that on the night of the banquet, I fought the Tezcucan; by favor of the gods, I defeated, without slaying him. He is here in person to acquit me."

"Bring the witness," said the judge.

Some of the officers retired; during their absence a solemn hush prevailed directly; they returned, carrying a palanquin. Right before the dais they set it down, and drew aside the curtains. Then slowly the Tezcucan came forth, — weak, but unconquered. At the judge he looked, and at the king, and all the fire of his haughty soul burned in the glance. Borrowing strength from his pride, he raised his head high, and said scornfully, —

"The power of my father's friend is exceeding great; he speaks, and all things obey him. I am sick and suffering; but he bade me come, and I am here. What new shame awaits me?"

Montezuma answered, never more a king than then: "'Hualpilli was wise; his son is foolish; for the memory of the one I spare the other. The keeper of this sacred place will answer why you are brought here. Look that he pardons you lightly as I have."

Then the judge said, "Prince of Tezcuco, you are here by my order. There stands one charged with your murder. Would you have had him

suffer the penalty? You have dared be insolent. See, O prince, that before to-morrow you pay the treasurer ten thousand quills of gold. See to it." And, returning the portrait to the clerk, he added, "Let the accused go acquit."

"Ah! said I not so, said I not so?" muttered the Chalcan, rubbing his hands joyfully, and disturbing the attentive people about him.

"Hist, hist!" they said impatiently. "What more? hearken!"

Hualpa was kneeling before the monarch.

"Most mighty king," he said, "if what I have done be worthy reward, grant me the discharge of this fine."

"How!" said Montezuma, amazed. "The Tezcucan is your enemy!"

"Yet he fought me fairly, and is a warrior."

The eyes of the king sought those of Iztlil'.

"What says the son of 'Hualpilli?'"

The latter raised his head with a flash of the old pride. "He is a slave of Guatamozin's: I scorn the intercession. I am yet a prince of Tezcuco."

Then the monarch went forward, and sat by the judge. Not a sound was heard, till he spoke.

"Arise, and come near," he said to Hualpa. "I will do what becomes me."

His voice was low and tremulous with feeling, and over his face came the peculiar suffusion of sadness afterwards its habitual expression. The hunter kissed the floor at his feet, and remained kneeling. Then he continued, —

"Son of the Tihuanca, I acknowledge I owe

my life to you, and I call all to hear the acknowledgment. If the people have thought this prosecution part of my gratitude, — if they have marveled at my appearing as your accuser, much have they wronged me. I thought of reward higher than they could have asked for you ; but I also thought to try you. A slave is not fit to be a chief, nor is every chief fit to be a king. I thought to try you : I am satisfied. When your fame goes abroad, as it will ; when the minstrels sing your valor ; when Tenochtitlan talks of the merchant's son, who, in the garden, slew the tiger, and saved the life of Montezuma, — let them also tell how Montezuma rewarded him ; let them say I made him noble."

Thereupon he arose, and transferred the *panache* from his head to Hualpa's. Those close by looked at the gift, and saw, for the first time, that it was not the crown, but the crest of a chief or cacique. Then they knew that the trial was merely to make more public the honors designed.

"Let them say further," he continued, "that with my own hand I made him a warrior of the highest grade." And, bending over the adventurer, he clasped around his neck the collar of the supreme military order of the realm.¹ "Nor is that all. Rank, without competence, is a vexation and shame. At the foot of Chapultepec, on the shore

¹ The authorities touching the military orders of the Aztecs are full and complete. Prescott, *Conq. of Mexico*, vol. i. p. 45; Acosta, Book vi. ch. 26; Mendoza's *Collec. Antiq. of Mexico*, vol. i. pl. 65.

of the lake, lie an estate and a palace of which I have been proud. Let it be said, finally, that I gave them to enrich him and his forever." He paused, and turned coldly to the Tezcucan. "But as to the son of 'Hualpilli, his fine must stand; such pride must be punished. He shall pay the gold, or forfeit his province." Then, outstretching toward the audience both his arms, he said, so as to be heard throughout the chamber, "Now, O my children, justice has been done!"

The words were simple; but the manner, royal as a king's and patriarchal as a pontiff's, brought every listener to his knees.

"Stand up, my lord Hualpa! Take your place in my train. I will return to the palace."

With that he passed out.

And soon there was but one person remaining, — Iztlil', the Tezcucan. Brought from Tlacopan by officers of the court, too weak to walk, without slaves to help him, at sight of the deserted hall his countenance became haggard, the light in his hollow eyes came and went, and his broad breast heaved passionately; in that long, slow look he measured the depth of his fall.

"O Tezcuco, Tezcuco, city of my fathers!" he cried aloud. "This is the last wrong to the last of thy race of kings."

A little after he was upon a bench exhausted, his head covered by his mantle. Then a hand was laid upon his shoulder; he looked up and saw Hualpa.

"How now! Has the base-born come to enjoy

his triumph? I cannot strike. Laugh and revile me; but remember, mine is the blood of kings. The gods loved my father, and will not abandon his son. In their names I curse you!"

"Tezcucan, you are proud to foolishness," said the hunter calmly. "I came to serve you. Within an hour I have become master of slaves" —

"And were yourself a slave!"

"Well, I won my freedom; I slew a beast and conquered a — But, prince, my slaves are at the door. Command them to Tlacopan."

"Play courtier to those who have influence; lean your ambition upon one who can advance it. I am undone."

"I am not a courtier. The service I offer you springs from a warrior's motive. I propose it, not to a man of power, but to a prince whose courage is superior to his fortune."

For a moment the Tezcucan studied the glowing face; then his brows relaxed, and, sighing like a woman, and like a woman overcome by the unexpected gentleness, he bowed his head, and covered his face with his hands, that he might not be accused of tears.

"Let me call the slaves, O prince," said Hualpa.

Thrice he clapped his hands, whereat four tattooed *tamanes* stalked into the chamber with a palanquin. Iztzil' took seat in the carriage, and was being borne away, when he called the hunter.

"A word," he said, in a voice from which all passion was gone. "Though my enemy, you have been generous, and remembered my misfortunes

when all others forsook me. Take with you this mark. I do not ask you to wear it, for the time is nearly come when the son of 'Hualpilli will be proscribed throughout the valley ; but keep it in witness that I, the son of a king, acknowledged your right and fitness to be a noble. Farewell."

Hualpa could not refuse a present so delicately given ; extending his hand, he received a bracelet of gold, set with an Aztec diamond of immense value. He clasped it upon his arm, and followed the carriage into the street.





BOOK FOUR





I

THE KING GIVES A TRUST TO HUALPA



AND now was come the time of all the year most pleasant, — the time when the *maguey* was greenest, when the cacti burst into flowers, and in every field women and children, with the strong men, went to pluck the ripened maize. Of the summer, only the wealth and beauty remained. The Goddess of Abundance divided the worship which, at other seasons, was mostly given to Huitzil' and Tezca';¹ in her temples the days were all of prayer, hymning, and priestly ceremony. No other towers sent

¹ Tezcatlipoca, a god next in rank to the Supreme Being. Supposed creator of the world.

up such columns of the blue smoke so grateful to the dwellers in the Sun ; in no other places were there such incessant burning of censers, presentation of gifts, and sacrifice of victims. Throughout the valley the people caroled those songs the sweetest and most millennial of men, — the songs of harvest, peace, and plenty.

I have before said that Tezcuco, the lake, was the especial pride of the Aztecs. When the sky was clear, and the air tranquil, it was very beautiful ; but when the king, with his court, all in state, set out for the hunting-grounds on the northern shore, its beauty rose to splendor. By his invitation great numbers of citizens, in style suited to the honor, joined their canoes to the flotilla composing the retinue. And let it not be forgotten that the Aztec loved his canoe as in Christendom the good knight loves his steed, and decorated it with all he knew of art ; that its prow, rising high above the water, and touched by the master sculptors, was dressed in garlands and fantastic symbols ; that its light and shapely canopy, elegantly trimmed within, was shaded by curtains, and surmounted by trailing streamers ; and that the slaves, four, six, and sometimes twelve in number, dipped and drew their flashing paddles in faultless time, and shone afar brilliant in livery. So, when the multitude of vessels cleared the city walls, and with music and songs dashed into the open lake, the very water seemed to dance and quiver with a sensuous pleasure.

In such style did Montezuma one pleasant

morning leave his capital. Calm was the lake, and so clear that the reflection of the sky above seemed a bed of blue below. There were music, and shouts, and merry songs, and from the city the cheers and plaudits of the thousands who, from the walls and housetops, witnessed the pageant. And his canoe was the soul of the pomp, and he had with him his favorite minstrel and jester, and Maxtla; yet there was something on his mind that made him indifferent to the scene and prospective sport. Some distance out, by his direction, the slaves so manœuvred that all the flotilla passed him; then he said to Maxtla, "The will has left me. I will not hunt to-day; yet the pastime must go on; a recall now were unkingly. Look out for a way to follow the train, while I return."

The chief arose, and swept the lake with a bright glance. "Yonder is a *chinampa*; I can take its master's canoe."

"Do so. Give this ring to the lord Cuitlahua, and tell him to conduct the hunt."

And soon Maxtla was hurrying to the north with the signet, while the monarch was speeding more swiftly to the south.

"For Iztapalapan," said the latter to his slaves. "Take me there before the lords reach the hunting-grounds, and you shall have a feast to-night."

They bent to the paddles, and rested not until he saw the white houses of the city, built far into the lake in imitation of the capital.

"Not to the town, but the palace of Guata-

mozin," he then said. "Speed! the sun is rising high."

Arrived at the landing, Montezuma set forward alone to the palace. The path led into a grove of cedar and wild orange-trees, interspersed with *ceibas*, the true kings of the forests of New Mexico. The air was sweet with perfume; birds sang to each other from the coverts; the adjacent cascades played their steady, muffled music; and altogether morning on the lake was less beautiful than morning in the 'tzin's garden. In the multitude of walks he became bewildered; but, as he was pleased by all he beheld, he walked on without consulting the sun. At length, guided by the sound of voices, he came to the arena for martial games; and there he found Hualpa and Io' practicing with the bow.

He had been wont to regard Io' as a child, unripe for any but childish amusements, and hardly to be trusted alone. Absorbed in his business of governing, he had not observed how increase of years brought the boy strength, stature, and corresponding tastes. Now he was admonished of his neglect; the stripling should have been familiarized with bow, sling, and *maquahuatl*; men ought to have been given him for comrades; the warrior's school, even the actual field, had been better for him than the nursery. An idea of ambition also occurred to the monarch. When he himself was gathered to his fathers, who was to succeed him on the throne? Cuitlahua, Cacamaca, the lord of Tlacopan? Why not Io'?

Meanwhile the two diligently pursued their sport. At the moment the king came upon them, Hualpa was giving some directions as to the mode of holding the brave weapon. The boy listened eagerly, — a sign that pleased the observer, for nothing is so easy as to flatter the hope of a dreamy heart. Observing them further, he saw Io' take the stand, draw the arrow quite to the head, and strike the target. At the second trial, he pierced the centre. Hualpa embraced the scholar joyously; and thereupon the king warmed toward the warrior, and tears blinded his eyes. Advancing into the arena, the clanging of his golden sandals announced his presence.

And they knelt and kissed the earth.

“Stand up!” he said, with the smile which gave his countenance a womanly beauty. And to Hualpa he added, “I thought your palace by Chapultepec would be more attractive than the practice of arms; more credit should have been given the habits of a hunter. I was right to make you noble. But what can you make of Io'?”

“If you will give the time, O king, I can make him of excellent skill.”

“And what says the son of Tecalco?”

Io' knelt again, saying, “I have a pardon to ask” —

“A pardon! For wishing to be a warrior?”

“If the king will hear me, — I have heard you say that in your youth you divided your days between the camp and the temples, learning at the same time the duties of the priest and the

warrior. That I may be able some day to serve you, O king, I have stolen away from Tenochtitlan —”

Montezuma laid his hand tenderly on the boy's head, and said, “No more. I know all you would say, and will ask the great Huitzil' to give you strength and courage. Take my permission to be a warrior. Arise, now, and give me the bow. It is long since I pulled the cord, and my hand may have weakened, and my eyes become dim ; but I challenge you both ! I have a shield wrought of pearl and gold, unfit for the field, yet beautiful as a prize of skill. Who plants an arrow nearest yon target's heart, his the shield shall be.”

The challenge was accepted, and after preparation, the monarch dropped his mantle, and took the stand. He drew the shaft to his ear with a careless show of skill ; and when it quivered in the target about a palm's breadth below the mark, he said, laughing, “I am at least within the line of the good bowman. A Tlascalan would not have escaped scarless.”

Io' next took the bow, and was so fortunate as to hit the lower edge of the heart squarely above the king's bolt.

“Mine is the shield, mine is the shield !” he cried exultantly. “Oh, that a minstrel were here ! I would have a song, — my first song !”

“Very proud !” said the king good-humoredly. “Know you, boy, the warrior counts his captives only when the battle is ended. Here, lord Hualpa, the boaster should be beaten. Prove

your quality. To you there may be more in this trial than a song or a golden shield."

The hunter took the vacant place; his arrow whistled away, and the report came back from the target. By a happy accident, if such it were, the copper point was planted exactly in the middle of the space between the other two.

More joyous than before arose the cry of Io', "I have beaten a king and a warrior! Mine is the shield, mine is the shield!"

And the king, listening, said to himself, "I remember my own youth, and its earliest victory, and how I passed from successes at first the most trifling. Ah! who but Huitzil', father of all the gods, can tell the end? Blessed the day when I can set before him the prospect of a throne instead of a shield!"

The target was brought him, and he measured the distance of each arrow from the centre; and when he saw how exactly Hualpa's was planted between the others, his subtle mind detected the purpose and the generosity.

"The victory is yours, O my son, and so is the shield," he said slowly and thoughtfully. "But ah! were it given you to look with eyes like mine, — with eyes sharpened by age for the discovery of blessings, — your rejoicing would be over a friend found, whose love is proof against vanity and the hope of reward."

Hualpa understood him, and was proud. What was the prize lost to Montezuma gained?

"It grows late; my time is sacred," said the

king. "Lord Hualpa, stay and guide me to the palace. And Io', be you my courier to the 'tzin. Go before, and tell him I am coming."

The boy ran ahead, and as they leisurely followed him, the monarch relapsed into melancholy. In the shade of a *ceiba* tree he stopped, and said, "There is a service you might do me, that lies nearer my heart than any other."

"The will of the great king is mine," Hualpa replied, with a low reverence.

"When I am old," pursued Montezuma, "when the things of earth begin to recede from me, it would be pleasant to have a son worthy to lift the Empire from my shoulders. While I am going up the steps of the temple, a seeker of the holy peace that lies in worship and prayer, the government would not then be a care to disturb me. But I am sensible that no one could thus relieve me unless he had the strong hand of a warrior, and was fearless except of the gods. Io' is my only hope. From you he first caught the desire of greatness, and you can make him great. Take him as a comrade; love him as a brother; teach him the elements of war, — to wield spear and *maquahuatl*; to bear shield, to command, and to be brave and generous. Show him the ways of ambition. Above all," — as he spoke he raised his head and hand, and looked the impersonation of his idea, — "above all, let him know that a king may find his glory as much in the love of his people as in his power. Am I understood?"

Hualpa did not look up, but said, "Am I

worthy? I have the skill of hand; but have I the learning?"

"To make him learned belongs to the priests. I only asked you to make him a warrior."

"Does not that belong to the gods?"

"No: he derives nothing from them but the soul. They will not teach him to launch the arrow."

"Then I accept the charge. Shall he go with me?"

"Always, — even to battle."

O mighty king! was the shadow of the coming fate upon thy spirit then?





II

THE KING AND THE 'TZIN



HE visit was unexpected to Guatamozin, and its object a mystery; but he thought only of paying the guest meet honor and respect, for he was still the great king. And so, bareheaded and unarmed, he went forth, and, meeting him in the garden, knelt, and saluted him after the manner of the court.

“I am glad to say the word of welcome to my father’s brother. Know, O king, that my house, my garden, and all you behold are yours.”

Hualpa left them; then Montezuma replied,

the sadness of his voice softening the austerity of his manner, —

“I have loved you well, Guatamozin. Very good it was to mark you come up from boyhood, and day by day grow in strength and thought. I never knew one so rich in promise. Ours is a proud race, and you seemed to have all its genius. From the beginning you were thoughtful and provident; in the field there was always a victory for you, and in council your words were the soul of policy. Oh, ill was the day evil came between us, and suspicion shattered the love I bore you! Arise! I have not crossed the lake for explanations; there is that to speak of more important to us both.”

The 'tzin arose, and looked into the monarch's face, his own suffused with grief.

“Is not a king punished for the wrong he does?”

Montezuma's brows lowered, chilling the fixed look which was his only answer; and the 'tzin spoke on.

“I cannot accuse you directly; but this I will say, O king: a just man, and a brave, never condemns another upon suspicion.”

The monarch's eyes blazed with sudden fire, and from his *maxtlatl* he drew a knife. The 'tzin moved not; the armed hand stopped; an instant each met the other's gaze, then the weapon was flung away.

“I am a child,” said the king, vexed and ashamed. “When I came here I did not think

of the past, I thought only of the Empire ; but trouble has devoured my strength of purpose, until my power mocks me, and, most miserable of men, I yearn to fly from myself, without knowing where to find relief. A vague impulse—whence derived, except from intolerable suffering of mind, I know not—brought me to you. Oh, 'tzin, silent be the differences that separate us. Yours I know to be a tongue of undefiled truth ; and if not for me now, for our country, and the renown of our fathers, I believe you will speak.”

The shame, the grief, and the self-accusation moved the 'tzin more than the deadly menace.

“Set my feet, O king! set my feet in the way to serve or save my country, and I will tread it, though every step be sown with the terrors of Mictlan.”

“I did not misjudge you, my son,” the king said, when he had again perfectly mastered his feelings.

And Guatamozin, yet more softened, would have given him all the old love, but that Tula, contracted to the Tezcucan, rose to memory. Checking the impulse, he regarded the unhappy monarch sorrowfully.

And the latter, glancing up at the sun, said,—

“It is getting late. I left the train going to the hunting-grounds. By noon they will return, and I wish to be at the city before them. My canoe lies at the landing ; walk there with me, and on the way I will speak of the purpose of my visit.”



Their steps as they went were slow, and their faces downcast and solemn. The king was first to speak.

“As the time requires, I have held many councils, and taken the voice of priest, warrior, and merchant; and they agree in nothing but their confusion and fear.”

“The king forgets, — I have been barred his councils, and know not what they considered.”

“True, true; yet there is but one topic in all Anahuac, — in the Empire. Of that, the *tamanes* talk gravely as their masters; only one class asks, ‘Who are the white men making all this trouble?’ while the other argues, ‘They are here; they are gods. What are we to do?’”

“And what say the councils, O king?”

“It could not be that all would speak as one man. Of different castes, they are differently moved. The *pabas* believe the Sun has sent us some godly warriors, whom nothing earthly can subdue. They advise patience, friendship, and peace. ‘The eye of Huitzil’ is on them, numbering their marches. In the shade of the great temple he awaits, and there he will consume them with a breath,’ — so say the *pabas*. The warriors are dumb, or else borrow and reassert the opinions of the holy men. ‘Give them gold, if they will depart; if not that, give them peace, and leave the issue to the gods,’ — so they say. *Cuitlahua* says war; so does *Cacama*. The merchants and the people have no opinion, — nothing but fear. For myself, yesterday I was for war,

to-day I am for peace. So far I have chosen to act upon the advice of the pabas. I have sent the strangers many presents and friendly messages, and kept ambassadors in their camp; but while preserving such relations, I have continually forbade their coming to Tenochtitlan. They seem bolder than men. Who but they would have undertaken the march from Cempoalla? What tribes or people could have conquered Tlascala, as they have? You have heard of their battles. Did they not in a day what we have failed to do in a hundred years? With Tlascala for ally, they have set my word at naught, and, whether they be of the sun or the earth, they are now marching upon Cholula, most sacred city of the gods. And from Cholula there is but one more march. Already from the mountains they have looked wistfully down on our valley of gardens, upon Tenochtitlan. O 'tzin, 'tzin, can we forget the prophecy?"

"Shall I say what I think? Will the king hear me?" asked Guatamozin.

"For that I came. Speak!"

"I obey gladly. The opportunity is dearer to me than any honor. And, speaking, I will remember of what race I am."

"Speak as if you were king."

"Then — I condemn your policy."

The monarch's face remained placid. If the bluff words wounded him, he dissembled consummately.

"It was not well to go so often to the temple,"

Guatamozin continued. "Huitzil' is not there; the pabas have only his name, his image and altar; your breast is his true temple; there ought you to find him. Yesterday, you say, you were for war; the god was with you then: to-day you are for peace; the god has abandoned you. I know not in what words the lords Cuitlahua and Cacama urged their counsel, nor on what grounds. By the Sun! theirs is the only policy that comports with the fame of a ruler of Aztecs. Why speak of any other? For me, I would seek the strangers in battle and die, sooner than a minstrel should sing, or tradition tell, how Guatamozin, overcome by fear, dwelt in their camp praying peace as the beggar prays for bread."

Literally, Guatamozin was speaking like a king.

"I have heard your pearl-divers say," he continued, "that they never venture into a strange sea without dread. Like the new sea to them, this subject has been to your people; but however the declaration may strike your ears, O king, I have sounded all its depths. While your priests were asking questions of speechless hearts; while your lords were nursing their love of ease in the shade and perfume of your palace; while your warriors, forgetful of their glory, indulged the fancy that the new enemy were gods; while Montezuma was watching stars, and studying omens, and listening to oracles which the gods know not, hoping for wisdom to be found nowhere as certainly as in his own royal instincts, — face to face with the strangers, in their very camp, I studied

them, their customs, language, and nature. Take heart, O king! Gods, indeed! Why, like men, I have seen them hunger and thirst; like men, heard them complain; on the other hand, like men, I have seen them feed and drink to surfeit, and heard them sing from gladness. What means their love of gold? If they come from the Sun, where the dwellings of the gods, and the hills they are built on, are all of gold, why should they be seeking it here? Nor is that all. I listened to the interpreter, through whom their leader explained his religion, and they are worshipers, like us, only they adore a woman, instead of a great, heroic god" —

"A woman!" exclaimed the king.

"Nay, the argument is that they worship at all. Gods do not adore each other!"

They had now walked some distance, and so absorbed had Montezuma been that he had not observed the direction they were pursuing. Emerging suddenly from a cypress-grove, he was surprised to find the path terminate in a small lake, which, at any other time, would have excited his admiration. Tall trees, draped to their topmost boughs in luxuriant vines, encircled the little expanse of water, and in its midst there was an island, crowned with a kiosk or summer-house, and covered with orange shrubs and tapering palms.

"Bear with me, O king," said Guatamozin, observing his wonder. "I brought you here that you may be absolutely convinced of the nature of our enemies. On that island I have an argument

stronger than the vagaries of pabas or the fancies of warriors, — a visible argument.”

He stepped into a canoe lying at the foot of the path, and, with a sweep of the paddle, drove across to the island. Remaining there, he pushed the vessel back.

“Come over, O king, come over, and see.”

Montezuma followed boldly, and was led to the kiosk. The retreat was not one of frequent resort. Several times they were stopped by vines grown across the path. Inside the house, the visitor had no leisure for observation ; he was at once arrested by an object that filled him with horror. On a table was a human head. Squarely severed from the body, it stood upright on the base of the neck, looking, with its ghastly, white face, directly toward the entrance. The features were swollen and ferocious ; the black brows locked in a frown, with which, as was plainly to be seen, nature had as much to do as death ; the hair was short, and on the crown almost worn away ; heavy, matted beard covered the cheeks and chin ; finally, other means of identification being wanted, the coarse, upturned mustache would have betrayed the Spaniard. Montezuma surveyed the head for some time ; at length, mastering his deep loathing, he advanced to the table.

“*A teule!*” he said, in a low voice.

“A man, — only a man!” exclaimed Guatamozin, so sternly that the monarch shrank as if the blue lips of the dead had spoken to him. “Ask yourself, O king, Do the gods die?”

Montezuma smiled, either at his own alarm or at the ghastly argument.

“Whence came the trophy?” he asked.

“Have you not heard of the battle of Nauhtlan?”

“Surely ; but tell it again.”

“When the strangers marched to Tlascala,” the ’tzin began, “their chief left a garrison behind him in the town he founded. I was then on the coast. To convince the people, and particularly the army, that they were men, I determined to attack them. An opportunity soon occurred. Your tax-gatherers happening to visit Nauhtlan, the township revolted, and claimed protection of the garrison, who marched to their relief. At my instance, the caciques drew their bands together, and we set upon the enemy. The Totonagues fled at our first war-cry ; but the strangers welcomed us with a new kind of war. They were few in number, but the thunder seemed theirs, and they hailed great stones upon us, and after a while came against us upon their fierce animals. When my warriors saw them come leaping on, they fled. All was lost. I had but one thought more,—a captive taken might save the Empire. I ran where the strangers clove their bloody way. This”—and he pointed to the head—“was the chief, and I met him in the rout, raging like a tiger in a herd of deer. He was bold and strong, and, shouting his battle-cry, he rushed upon me. His spear went through my shield. I wrenched it from him, and slew the beast ; then I dragged

him away, intending to bring him alive to Tenochtitlan; but he slew himself. So look again! What likeness is there in that to a god? O king, I ask you, did ever its sightless eyes see the glories of the Sun, or its rotting lips sing a song in heaven? Is Huitzil' or Tezca' made of such stuff?"

The monarch, turning away, laid his hand familiarly on the 'tzin's arm, and said, —

"Come, I am content. Let us go."

And they started for the landing.

"The strangers, as I have said, my son, are marching to Cholula. And Malinche — so their chief is called — now says he is coming to Tenochtitlan."

"To Tenochtitlan! In its honored name, in the name of its kings and gods, I protest against his coming!"

"Too late, too late!" replied Montezuma, his face working as though a pang were at his heart. "I have invited him to come."

"Alas, alas!" cried Guatamozin solemnly. "The day he enters the capital will be the commencement of the woe, if it has not already commenced. The many victories will have been in vain. The provinces will drop away, like threaded pearls when the string is broken. O king, better had you buried your crown, — better for your people, better for your own glory!"

"Your words are bitter," said the monarch gloomily.

"I speak from the fullness of a heart darkened

by a vision of Anahuac blasted, and her glory 'gone,' returned the 'tzin. Then in a lament, vivid with poetic coloring, he set forth a picture of the national ruin, — the armies overthrown, the city wasted, the old religion supplanted by a new. At the shore where the canoe was waiting, Montezuma stopped, and said, —

“You have spoken boldly, and I have listened patiently. One thing more: What does Guatamozin say the king should do?”

“It is not enough for the servant to know his own place; he should know his master's also. I say not what the king should do, but I will say what I would do if I were king.”

Rising from the obeisance with which he accompanied the words, he said boldly, —

“Cholula should be the grave of the invaders. The whole population should strike them in the narrow streets where they can be best assailed. Shut up in some square or temple, hunger will fight them for us, and win. But I would not trust the citizens alone. In sight of the temples, so close that a conch could summon them to the attack, I would encamp a hundred thousand warriors. Better the desolation of Cholula than Tenochtitlan. If all things else failed, I would take to the last resort; I would call in the waters of Tezcuco and drown the city to the highest *azoteas*. So would I, O king, if the crown and signet were mine.”

Montezuma looked from the speaker to the lake.

“The project is bold,” he said musingly; “but if it failed, my son?”

“The failure should be but the beginning of the war.”

“What would the nations say?”

“They would say, ‘Montezuma is still the great king.’ If they do not that” —

“What then?”

“Call on the *teotuctli*. The gods can be made speak whatever your policy demands.”

“Does my son blaspheme?” said Montezuma angrily.

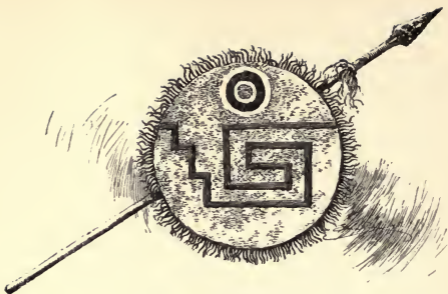
“Nay, I but spoke of what has happened. Long rule the good god of our fathers!”

Yet the monarch was not satisfied. Never before had discourse been addressed to him in strain so bold.

“They see all things, even our hearts,” he said, turning coldly away. “Farewell. A courier will come for you when your presence is wanted in the city.”

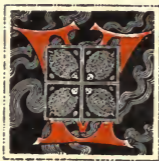
And so they separated, conscious that no healing had been brought to their broken friendship. As the canoe moved off, the 'tzin knelt, but the king looked not that way again.





III

LOVE ON THE LAKE



HAT can they mean? Here have they been loitering since morning, as if the lake, like the *tian-guez*, were a place for idlers. As I love the gods, if I knew them, they should be punished!"

So the farmer of the *chinampa* heretofore described as the property of the princess Tula gave expression to his wrath; after which he returned to his employment; that is, he went crawling among the shrubs and flowers, pruning-knife in hand, here clipping a limb, there loosening the loam. Emerging from the thicket after a protracted stay, his ire was again aroused.

"Still there! Thieves may be, watching a chance to steal. But we shall see. My work is done, and I will not take eyes off of them again."

The good man's alarm was occasioned by the occupants of a canoe, which, since sunrise, had been plying about the garden, never stationary, seldom more than three hundred yards away, yet always keeping on the side next the city. Once in a while the slaves withdrew their paddles, leaving the vessel to the breeze; at such times it drifted so near that he could see the *voyageurs* reclining in the shade of the blue canopy, wrapped in *escaupils* such as none but lords or distinguished merchants were permitted to wear.

The leisurely *voyageurs*, on their part, appeared to have a perfect understanding of the light in which they were viewed from the *chinampa*.

"There he is again! See!" said one of them.

The other lifted the curtain, and looked, and laughed.

"Ah! if we could send an arrow there, just near enough to whistle through the orange-trees. Tula would never hear the end of the story. He would tell her how two thieves came to plunder him; how they shot at him; how narrowly he escaped" —

"And how valiantly he defended the garden. By Our Mother, Io', I have a mind to try him!"

Hualpa half rose to measure the distance, but fell back at once. "No. Better that we get into no difficulty. We are messengers, and have these flowers to deliver. Besides, the judge is not to my liking."

"Tula is merciful, and would forgive you for the 'tzin's sake."

"I meant the judge of the court," Hualpa said soberly. "You never saw him lift the golden arrow, as if to draw it across your portrait. It is pleasanter sitting here, in the shade, rocked by the water."

"And pleasanter yet to be made noble and master of a palace over by Chapultepec," Io' answered. "But see! Yonder is a canoe."

"From the city?"

"It is too far off; wait awhile."

But Hualpa, impatient, leaned over the side, and looked for himself. At the time they were up in the northern part of the lake, at least a league from the capital. Long, regular swells, something like those of the sea when settling into calm, tumbled the surface; far to the south, however, he discerned the canoe, looking no larger than a blue-winged gull.

"It is coming; I see the prow this way. Is the vase ready?"

"The vase! You forget; there are two of them."

Hualpa looked down confused.

"Does the 'tzin intend them both for Tula?"

Hualpa was the more embarrassed.

"Flowers have a meaning; sometimes they tell tales. Let me see if I cannot read what the 'tzin would say to Tula."

And Io' went forward and brought the vases, and, placing them before him, began to study each flower.

"Io'," said Hualpa in a low voice, "but one of the vases is the 'tzin's."

“And the other?” asked the prince, looking up.

Hualpa’s face flushed deeper.

“The other is mine. Have you not two sisters?”

Io’s eyes dilated; a moment he was serious, then he burst out laughing.

“I have you now! Nenetzin, — she, too, has a lover.”

The hunter never found himself so at loss; he played with the loops of his *escaupil*, and refused to take his eyes off the coming canoe. Through his veins the blood ran merrily; in his brain it intoxicated, like wine.

“I have heard how love makes women of warriors; now I will see, — I will see how brave you are.”

“Ho, slaves! Put the canoe about; yonder are those whom I would meet,” Hualpa shouted.

The vessel was headed to the south. A long distance had to be passed, and in the time the ambassador recovered himself. Lying down again, and twanging the chord of his bow, he endeavored to compose a speech to accompany the delivery of the vase to Tula. But his thoughts would return to his own love; the laugh with which Io’ received his explanation flattered him; and, true to the logic of the passion, he already saw the vase accepted, and himself the favored of Nenetzin. From that point the world of dreams was but a step distant; he took the step, but was brought back by Io’.

“They recognize us; Nenetzin waves her scarf!”

The approaching vessel was elegant as the art of the Aztecan shipmaster could make it. The prow was sculptured into the head and slender, curved neck of a swan. The passengers, fair as ever journeyed on sea wave, sat under a canopy of royal green, above which floated a *panache* of long, trailing feathers, colored like the canopy. Like a creature of the water, so lightly, so gracefully, the boat drew nigh the messengers. When alongside, Io' sprang aboard, and, with boyish ardor, embraced his sisters.

“What has kept you so?”

“We stayed to see twenty thousand warriors cross the causeway,” replied Nenetzin.

“Where can they be going?”

“To Cholula.”

The news excited the boy; turning to speak to Hualpa, he was reminded of his duty.

“Here is a messenger from Guatamozin, — the lord Hualpa, who slew the tiger in the garden.”

The heart of the young warrior beat violently; he touched the floor of the canoe with his palm.

And Tula spoke. “We have heard the minstrels sing the story. Arise, lord Hualpa.”

“The words of the noble Tula are pleasanter than any song. Will she hear the message I bring?”

She looked at Io' and Nenetzin, and assented.

“Guatamozin salutes the noble Tula. He hopes the blessings of the gods are about her.

He bade me say, that four mornings ago the king visited him at his palace, but talked of nothing but the strangers; so that the contract with Iztzil', the Tezcucan, still holds good. Further, the king asked his counsel as to what should be done with the strangers. He advised war, whereupon the king became angry, and departed, saying that a courier would come for the 'tzin when his presence was wanted in the city; so the banishment also holds good. And so, finally, there is no more hope from interviews with the king. All that remains is to leave the cause to time and the gods."

A moment her calm face was troubled; but she recovered, and said, with simple dignity, —

"I thank you. Is the 'tzin well and patient?"

"He is a warrior, noble Tula, and foemen are marching through the provinces, like welcome guests; he thinks of them, and curses the peace as a season fruitful of dishonor."

Nenetzin, who had been quietly listening, was aroused.

"Has he heard the news? Does he not know a battle is to be fought in Cholula?"

"Such tidings will be medicine to his spirit."

"A battle!" cried Io'. "Tell me about it, Nenetzin."

"I, too, will listen," said Hualpa; "for the gods have given me a love of words spoken with a voice sweeter than the flutes of Tezca'."

The girl laughed aloud, and was well pleased, although she answered, —

“My father gave me a bracelet this morning, but he did not carry his love so far as to tell me his purposes ; and I am not yet a warrior to talk to warriors about battles. The lord Maxtla, even Tula here, can better tell you of such things.”

“Of what ?” asked Tula.

“Io’ and his friend wish to know all about the war.”

The elder princess mused a moment, and then said gravely, “You may tell the ’tzin, as from me, lord Hualpa, that twenty thousand warriors this morning marched for Cholula ; that the citizens there have been armed ; and to-morrow, the gods willing, Malinche will be attacked. The king at one time thought of conducting the expedition himself ; but, by persuasion of the paba, Mualox, he has given the command to the lord Cuitlahua.”

Io’ clapped his hands. “The gods are kind ; let us rejoice, O Hualpa ! What marching of armies there will be ! What battles ! Hasten, and let us to Cholula ; we can be there before the night sets in.”

“What !” said Nenetzin. “Would you fight, Io’ ? No, no ; come home with us, and I will put my parrot in a tree, and you may shoot at him all day.”

The boy went to his own canoe, and, returning, held up a shield of pearl and gold. “See ! With a bow I beat our father and the lord Hualpa, and this was the prize.”

“That a shield !” Nenetzin said. “A toy, — a mere brooch to a Tlascalan. I have a tortoise-shell that will serve you better.”

The boy frowned, and a rejoinder was on his lips when Tula spoke.

“The flowers in your vases are very beautiful, lord Hualpa. What altar is to receive the tribute?”

Nenetzin's badinage had charmed the ambassador into forgetfulness of his embassy; so he answered confusedly, “The noble Tula reminds me of my duty. Before now, standing upon the hills of Tihuanco, watching the morning brightening in the east, I have forgotten myself. I pray pardon” —

Tula glanced archly at Nenetzin. “The morning looks pleasant; doubtless, its worshiper will be forgiven.”

And then he knew the woman's sharp eyes had seen into his inner heart, and that the audacious dream he there cherished was exposed; yet his confusion gave place to delight, for the discovery had been published with a smile. Thereupon, he set one of the vases at her feet, and touched the floor with his palm, and said, —

“I was charged by Guatamozin to salute you again, and say that these flowers would tell you all his hopes and wishes.”

As she raised the gift, her hand trembled; then he discovered how precious a simple Cholulan vase could become; and with that his real task was before him. Taking the other vase, he knelt before Nenetzin.

“I have but little skill in courtierly ways,” he said. “In flowers I see nothing but their beauty;

and what I would have these say is, that if Nenetzin, the beautiful Nenetzin, will accept them, she will make me very happy."

The girl looked at Tula, then at him; then she raised the vase, and, laughing, hid her face in the flowers.

But little more was said; and soon the lashings were cast off, and the vessels separated.

On the return Hualpa stopped at Tenochtitlan, and in the shade of the portico, over a cup of the new beverage, now all the fashion, received from Xoli the particulars of the contemplated attack upon the strangers in Cholula; for, with his usual diligence in the fields of gossip, the broker had early informed himself of all that was to be heard of the affair. And that night, while Io' dreamed of war, and the hunter of love, the 'tzin paced his study or wandered through his gardens, feverishly solicitous about the result of the expedition.

"If it fail," he repeated over and over, — "if it fail, Malinche will enter Tenochtitlan as a god!"





IV

THE KING DEMANDS A SIGN OF MUALOX

NEXT morning Mualox ascended the tower of his old Cû. The hour was so early that the stars were still shining in the east. He fed the fire in the great urn until it burst into cheery flame; then, spreading his mantle on the roof, he lay down to woo back the slumber from which he had been taken. By and by, a man, armed with a javelin, and clad in cotton mail, came up the steps, and spoke to the paba.

“Does the servant of his god sleep this morning?”

Mualox arose, and kissed the pavement.

"Montezuma is welcome. The blessing of the gods upon him!"

"Of all the gods, Mualox?"

"Of all, — even Quetzal's, O king!"

"Arise! Last night I bade you wait me here. I said I would come with the morning star; yonder it is, and I am faithful. The time is fittest for my business."

Mualox arose, and stood before the monarch with bowed head and crossed hands.

"Montezuma knows his servant."

"Yet I seek to know him better. Mualox, Mualox, have you room for a perfect love aside from Quetzal? What would you do for me?"

"Ask me rather what I would not do."

"Hear me, then. Lately you have been a coun-
cilor in my palace; with my policy and purposes you are acquainted; you knew of the march to Cholula, and the order to attack the strangers; you were present when they were resolved" —

"And opposed them. Witness for me to Quetzal, O king!"

"Yes, you prophesied evil and failure from them, and for that I seek you now. Tell me, O Mualox, spake you then as a prophet?"

The paba ventured to look up and study the face of the questioner as well as he could in the flickering light.

"I know the vulgar have called me a magician," he said slowly; "and sometimes they have spoken of my commerce with the stars. To say that

either report is true, were wrong to the gods. Regardful of them, I cannot answer you; but I can say — and its sufficiency depends on your wisdom — your slave, O king, is warned of your intention. You come asking a sign; you would have me prove my power, that it may be seen.”

“By the Sun” —

“Nay, — if my master will permit, — another word.”

“I came to hear you; say on.”

“You spoke of me as a councilor in the palace. How may we measure the value of honors? By the intent with which they are given? O king, had you not thought the poor paba would use his power for the betrayal of his god; had you not thought he could stand between you and the wrath” —

“No more, Mualox, no more!” said Montezuma. “I confess I asked you to the palace that you might befriend me. Was I wrong to count on your loyalty? Are you not of Anahuac? And further; I confess I come now seeking a sign. I command you to show me the future!”

“If you do indeed believe me the beloved of Quetzal’ and his prophet, then are you bold, — even for a king.”

“Until I wrong the gods, why should I fear? I, too, am a priest.”

“Be wise, O my master! Let the future alone; it is sown with sorrows to all you love.”

“Have done, paba!” the king exclaimed angrily. “I am weary, — by the Sun! I am weary of such words.”

The holy man bowed reverently, and touched the floor with his palm, saying, —

“Mualox lays his heart at his master's feet. In the time when his beard was black and his spirit young, he began the singing of two songs, — one of worship to Quetzal', the other of love for Montezuma.”

These words he said tremulously; and there was that in the manner, in the bent form, in the low obeisance, which soothed the impatience of the king, so that he turned away, and looked out over the city. And day began to gild the east; in a short time the sun would claim his own. Still the monarch thought, still Mualox stood humbly waiting his pleasure. At length the former approached the fire.

“Mualox,” he said, speaking slowly, “I crossed the lake the other day, and talked with Guatamozin about the strangers. He satisfied me they are not *teules*, and, more, he urged me to attack them in Cholula.”

“The 'tzin!” exclaimed Mualox, in strong surprise.

Montezuma knew the love of the paba for the young cacique rested upon his supposed love of Quetzal'; so he continued, —

“The attack was planned by him; only he would have sent a hundred thousand warriors to help the citizens. The order is out; the companies are there; blood will run in the streets of the holy city to-day. The battle waits on the sun, and it is nearly up. Mualox,” — his manner be-

came solemn, — “Mualox, on this day’s work bides my peace. The morning comes : by all your prophet’s power, tell me what the night will bring !”

Sorely was the paba troubled. The king’s faith in his qualities as prophet he saw was absolute, and that it was too late to deny the character.

“Does Montezuma believe the Sun would tell me what it withholds from its child ?”

“Quetzal’, not the Sun, will speak to you.”

“But Quetzal’ is your enemy.”

Montezuma laid his hand on the paba’s. “I have heard you speak of love for me ; prove it now, and your reward shall be princely. I will give you a palace, and many slaves, and riches beyond count.”

Mualox bent his head, and was silent. Enjoyment of a palace meant abandonment of the old Cû and sacred service. Just then the wail of a watcher from a distant temple swept faintly by ; he heard the cry, and from his surplice drew a trumpet, and through it sung with a swelling voice, —

“Morning is come ! Morning is come ! To the temples, O worshipers ! Morning is come !”

And the warning hymn, the same that had been heard from the old tower for so many ages, heard heralding suns while the city was founding, given now, amid the singer’s sore perplexity, was an assurance to his listening deity that he was faithful against kingly blandishments as well as kingly neglect. While the words were being repeated from the many temples, he stood attentive to them, then he turned, and said, —

“Montezuma is generous to his slave; but ambition is a goodly tree gone to dust in my heart; and if it were not, O king, what are all your treasures to that in the golden chamber? Nay, keep your offerings, and let me keep the temple. I hunger after no riches except such as lie in the love of Quetzal’.”

“Then tell me,” said the monarch impatiently, — “without price, tell me his will.”

“I cannot, I am but a man; but this much I can” — He faltered; the hands crossed upon his breast closed tightly, and the breast labored painfully.

“I am waiting. Speak! What can you?”

“Will the king trust his servant, and go with him down into the Cû again?”

“To talk with the Morning, this is the place,” said the monarch, too well remembering the former introduction to the mysteries of the ancient house.

“My master mistakes me for a juggling soothsayer; he thinks I will look into the halls of the Sun through burning drugs, and the magic of unmeaning words. I have nothing to do with the Morning; I have no incantations. I am but the dutiful slave of Quetzal’, the god, and Montezuma, the king.”

The royal listener looked away again, debating with his fears, which, it is but just to say, were not of harm from the paba. Men unfamiliar with the custom do not think lightly of encountering things unnatural; in this instance, moreover, favor

was not to be hoped from the god through whom the forbidden knowledge was to come. But curiosity and an uncontrollable interest in the result of the affair in Cholula overcame his apprehensions.

"I will go with you. I am ready," he said.

The old man stooped, and touched the roof, and, rising, said, "I have a little world of my own, O king; and though without sun and stars, and the grand harmony which only the gods can give, it has its wonders and beauty, and is to me a place of perpetual delight. Bide my return a little while. I will go and prepare the way for you."

Resuming his mantle, he departed, leaving the king to study the new-born day. When he came back, the valley and the sky were full of the glory of the sun full risen. And they descended to the *azoteas*, thence to the courtyard. Taking a lamp hanging in a passage-door, the holy man, with the utmost reverence, conducted his guest into the labyrinth. At first, the latter tried to recollect the course taken, the halls and stairs passed, and the stories descended; but the thread was too often broken, the light too dim, the way too intricate. Soon he yielded himself entirely to his guide, and followed, wondering much at the massiveness of the building, and the courage necessary to live there alone. Ignorant of the zeal which had become the motive of the paba's life, inspiring him with incredible cunning and industry, and equally without a conception of the power there is in one idea long awake in the soul and nursed into mania, it was not singular that, as

they went, the monarch should turn the very walls into witnesses corroborant of the traditions of the temple and the weird claims of its keeper.

Passing the kitchen, and descending the last flight of steps, they came to the trap-door in the passage, beside which lay the ladder of ropes.

"Be of courage a little longer, O king," said Mualox, flinging the ladder through the doorway. "We are almost there."

And the paba, leaving the lamp above, committed himself confidently to the ropes and darkness below. A suspicion of his madness occurred to the king, whose situation called for consideration; in fact, he hesitated to follow farther; twice he was called to; and when, finally, he did go down, the secret of his courage was an idea that they were about to emerge from the dusty caverns into the freer air of day; for, while yet in the passage, he heard the whistle of a bird, and fancied he detected a fragrance as of flowers.

"Your hand now, O king, and Mualox will lead you into his world."

The motives that constrained the holy man to this step are not easily divined. Of all the mysteries of the house, that hall was by him the most cherished; and of all men the king was the last whom he would have voluntarily chosen as a participant in its secrets, since he alone had power to break them up. The necessity must have been very great; possibly he felt his influence and peculiar character dependent upon yielding to the pressure; the moment the step was resolved

upon, however, nothing remained but to use the mysteries for the protection of the abode; and with that purpose he went to prepare the way.

Much study would most of us have required to know what was essential to the purpose; not so the paba. He merely trimmed the lamps already lighted, and lighted and disposed others. His plan was to overwhelm the visitor by the first glance; without warning, without time to study details, to flash upon him a crowd of impossibilities. In the mass, the generality, the whole together, a god's hand was to be made apparent to a superstitious fancy.





V

THE MASSACRE IN CHOLULA

INSIDE the hall, scarcely a step from the curtain, the monarch stopped bewildered ; half amazed, half alarmed, he surveyed the chamber, now glowing as with day. Flowers blooming, birds singing, shrubbery, thick and green as in his own garden. Whence came they ? how were they nurtured down so far ? And the countless subjects painted on the ceiling and walls, and woven in colors on the tapestry, — surely they were the work of the same master who had wrought so marvelously in the golden chamber. The extent of the hall, exaggerated by the

light, impressed him. Filled with the presence of what seemed impossibilities, he cried out, —

“The abode of Quetzal’!”

“No,” answered Mualox, “not his abode, only his temple, — the temple of his own building.”

And from that time it was with the king as if the god were actually present.

The paba read the effect in the monarch’s manner, — in his attitude, in the softness of his tread, in the cloudy, saddened expression of his countenance, in the whisper with which he spoke; he read it, and was assured.

“This way, O king! Though your servant cannot let you see into the Sun, or give you the sign required, follow him, and he will bring you to hear of events in Cholula even as they transpire. Remember, however, he says now that the Cholulans and the twenty thousand warriors will fail, and the night bring you but sorrow and repentance.”

Along the aisles he conducted him, until they came to the fountain, where the monarch stopped again. The light there was brighter than in the rest of the hall. A number of birds flew up, scared by the stranger; in the space around the marble basin stood vases crowned with flowers; the floor was strewn with wreaths and garlands; the water sparkled with silvery lustre; yet all were lost on the wondering guest, who saw only Tecetl, — a vision, once seen, to be looked at again and again.

Upon a couch, a little apart from the fountain,

she sat, leaning against a pile of cushions, which was covered by a mantle of *plumaje*. Her garments were white, and wholly without ornament; her hair strayed lightly from a wreath upon her head; the childish hands lay clasped in her lap; upon the soft mattress rested the delicate limbs, covered, but not concealed, the soles of the small feet tinted with warmth and life, like the pink and rose lining of certain shells. So fragile, innocent, and beautiful looked she, and so hushed and motionless withal, — so like a spirituality, — that the monarch's quick sensation of sympathy shot through his heart an absolute pain.

“Disturb her not; let her sleep,” he whispered, waving his hand.

Mualox smiled.

“Nay, the full battle-cry of your armies would not waken her.”

The influence of the Will was upon her, stronger than slumber. Not yet was she to see a human being other than the paba, — not even the great king. A little longer was she to be happy in ignorance of the actual world. Ah, many, many are the victims of affection unwise in its very fullness!

Again and again the monarch scanned the girl's face, charmed, yet awed. The paba had said the sleep was wakeless; and that was a mystery unreported by tradition, unknown to his philosophy, and rarer, if not greater, than death. If life at all, what kind was it? The longer he looked and reflected, the lovelier she grew. So

completely was his credulity gained that he thought not once of questioning Mualox about her ; he was content with believing.

The paba, meantime, had been holding one of her hands, and gazing intently in her face. When he looked up, the monarch was startled by his appearance ; his air was imposing, his eyes lighted with the mesmeric force.

“ Sit, O king, and give ear. Through the lips of his child, Quetzal’ will speak, and tell you of the day in Cholula.”

He spoke imperiously, and the monarch obeyed. Then, disturbed only by the chiming of the fountain, and sometimes by the whistling of the birds, Tecetl began, and softly, brokenly, unconsciously told of the massacre in the holy city of Cholula. Not a question was asked her. There was little prompting aloud. Much did the king marvel, never once doubted he.

“ The sky is very clear,” said Tecetl. “ I rise into the air ; I leave the city in the lake, and the lake itself ; now the mountains are below me. Lo, another city ! I descend again ; the *azotcas* of a temple receives me ; around are great houses. Who are these I see ? There, in front of the temple, they stand, in lines ; even in the shade their garments glisten. They have shields ; some bear long lances, some sit on strange animals that have eyes of fire and ring the pavement with their stamping.”

“ Does the king understand ? ” asked Mualox.

“ She describes the strangers,” was the reply.

And Tecetl resumed. "There is one standing in the midst of a throng; he speaks, they listen. I cannot repeat his words, or understand them, for they are not like ours. Now I see his face, and it is white; his eyes are black, and his cheeks bearded; he is angry; he points to the city around the temple, and his voice grows harsh, and his face dark."

The king approached a step, and whispered, "Malinche!"

But Mualox replied with flashing eyes, "The servant knows his god; it is Quetzal'!"

"He speaks, I listen," Tecetl continued, after a rest, and thenceforth her sentences were given at longer intervals. "Now he is through; he waves his hand, and the listeners retire, and go to different quarters; in places they kindle fires; the gates are open, and some station themselves there."

"Named she where this is happening?" asked Montezuma.

"She describes the strangers; and are they not in Cholula, O king? She also spoke of the *azoteas* of a temple" —

"True, true," replied the king moodily. "The preparations must be going on in the square of the temple in which Malinche was lodged last night."

Tecetl continued. "And now I look down the street; a crowd approaches from the city" —

"Speak of them," said Mualox. "I would know who they are."

“Most of them wear long beards and robes, like yours, father,— robes white and reaching to their feet ; in front a few come, swinging censers ” —

“They are pabas from the temples,” said Mualox.

“Behind them I see a greater crowd,” she continued. “How stately their step! how beautiful their plumes!”

“The twenty thousand! the army!” said Mualox.

“No, she speaks of them as plumed. They must be lords and caciques going to the temple.” While speaking, the monarch’s eyes wandered restlessly, and he sighed, saying, “Where can the companies be? It is time they were in the city.”

So his anxiety betrayed itself.

Then Mualox said grimly, “Hope not, O king. The priests and caciques go to death ; the army would but swell the flow of blood.”

Montezuma clapped his hands, and drooped his head.

“Yet more,” said Tecetl almost immediately ; “another crowd comes on, a band reaching far down the street ; they are naked, and come without order, bringing ” —

“The *tamanes*,” said Mualox, without looking from her face.

“And now,” she said, “the city begins to stir. I look, and on the housetops and temples hosts collect ; from all the towers the smoke goes up in bluer columns ; yet all is still. Those who

carry the censers come near the gate below me ; now they are within it ; the plumed train follows them, and the square begins to fill. Back by the great door, on one of the animals, the god " —

" Quetzal'," muttered Mualox.

" A company, glistening, surrounds him ; his face seems whiter than before, his eyes darker ; a shield is on his arm, white plumes toss above his head. The censer-bearers cross the square, and the air thickens with a sweet perfume. Now he speaks to them ; his voice is harsh and high ; they are frightened ; some kneel, and begin to pray as to a god ; others turn and start quickly for the gate."

" Take heed, take heed, O king !" said Mualox, his eyes aflame.

And Montezuma answered, trembling with fear and rage, " Has Anahuac no gods to care for her children ? "

" What can they against the Supreme Quetzal' ? It is a trial of power. The end is at hand ! "

Never man spoke more confidently than the paba.

By this time Tecetl's face was flushed, and her voice faint. Mualox filled the hollow of his hand with water, and laved her forehead. And she sighed wearily and continued, —

" The fair-faced god " —

" Mark the words, O king, — mark the words ! " said the paba.

" The fair-faced god quits speaking ; he waves

his hand, and one of his company on the steps of the temple answers with a shout. Lo! a stream of fire, and a noise like the bursting of a cloud! a rising, rolling cloud of smoke veils the whole front of the house. How the smoke thickens! How the strangers rush into the square! The square itself trembles! I do not understand it, father" —

"It is battle! On, child! a king waits to see a god in battle."

"In my pictures there is nothing like this, nor have you told me of anything like it. Oh, it is fearful!" she said. "The crowd in the middle of the square, those who came from the city, are broken, and rush here and there; at the gates they are beaten back; some, climbing the walls, are struck by arrows, and fall down screaming. Hark! how they call on the gods, — Huitzil', Tezca', Quetzal'. And why are they not heard? Where, father, where is the good Quetzal'?"

Flashed the paba's eyes with the superhuman light, — other answer he deigned not; and she proceeded.

"What a change has come over the square! Where are they that a while ago filled it with white robes and dancing plumes?"

She shuddered visibly.

"I look again. The pavement is covered with heaps of the fallen, and among them I see some with plumes and some with robes; even the censor-bearers lie still. What can it mean? And all the time the horror grows. When the thunder

and fire and smoke burst from near the temple-steps, how the helpless in the square shriek with terror and run blindly about! How many are torn to pieces! Down they go; I cannot count them, they fall so fast, and in such heaps! Then — ah, the pavement looks red! Oh, father, it is blood!”

She stopped. Montezuma covered his face with his hands; the good heart that so loved his people sickened at their slaughter.

Again Mualox bathed her face. Joy flamed in his eyes; Quetzal' was consummating his vengeance, and confirming the prophecies of his servant.

“Go on; stay not!” he said sternly. “The story is not told.”

“Still the running to and fro, and the screaming; still the fire flashing, and the smoke rising, and the hissing of arrows and sound of blows; still the prayers to Huitzil'!” said Tecetl. “I look down, and under the smoke, which has a choking smell, I see the fallen. Red pools gather in the hollow places, plumes are broken, and robes are no longer white. Oh, the piteous looks I see, the moans I hear, the many faces, brown like oak-leaves faded, turned stilly up to the sun!”

“The people of the god, — tell of them,” said Mualox.

“I search for them, — I see them on the steps and out by the walls and the gates. They are all in their places yet; not one of them is down; theirs the arrows, and the fire and thunder.”

“Does the king hear?” asked Mualox. “Only the pabas and caciques perish. Who may presume to oppose Quetzal’? Look further, child. Tell us of the city.”

“Gladly, most gladly! Now, abroad over the city. The people quit the housetops; they run from all directions to the troubled temple; they crowd the streets; about the gates, where the gods are, they struggle to get into the square, and the air thickens with their arrows. The god” —

“What god?” asked Mualox.

“The white-plumed one.”

“Quetzal’! Go on!”

“He has” — She faltered.

“What?”

“In my pictures, father, there is nothing like them. Fire leaps from their mouths, and smoke, and the air and earth tremble when they speak; and see — ah, how the crowds in the streets go down before them!”

Again she shuddered, and faltered.

“Hear, O king!” said Mualox, who not only recognized the cannon of the Spaniards in the description, but saw their weight at that moment as an argument. “What can the slingers, and the spearmen of Chinantla, and the swordsmen of Tenochtitlan, against warriors of the Sun, with their lightning and thunder!”

And he looked at the monarch, sitting with his face covered, and was satisfied. With faculties sharpened by a zeal too fervid for sympathy,

he saw the fears of the proud but kindly soul, and rejoiced in them. Yet he permitted no delay.

“Go on, child! Look for the fair-faced god; he holds the battle in his hand.”

“I see him, — I see his white plumes nodding in a group of spears. Now he is at the main gate of the temple, and speaks. Hark! The earth is shaken by another roar, — from the street another great cry; and through the smoke, out of the gate, he leads his band. And the animals, — what shall I call them?”

“Tell us of the god!” replied the enthusiast, himself ignorant of the name and nature of the horse.

“Well, well, — they run like deer; on them the god and his comrades plunge into the masses in the street; beating back and pursuing, striking with their spears, and trampling down all in their way. Stones and arrows are flung from the houses, but they avail nothing. The god shouts joyously, he plunges on; and the blood flows faster than before; it reddens the shields, it drips from the spear-points” —

“Enough, Mualox!” said Montezuma, starting from his seat, and speaking firmly. “I want no more. Guide me hence!”

The paba was surprised; rising slowly, he asked, —

“Will not the king stay to the end?”

“Stay!” repeated the monarch, with curling lip. “Are my people of Cholula wolves that I should be glad at their slaughter? It is murder,

massacre, not battle! Show me to the roof again. Come!"

Mualox turned to Tecetl; touching her hand, he found it cold; the sunken eyes, and the lips, vermeil no longer, admonished him of the delicacy of her spirit and body. He filled a vase at the fountain, and laved her face, the while soothingly repeating, "Tecetl, Tecetl, child!" Some minutes were thus devoted; then kissing her, and replacing the hand tenderly in the other lying in her lap, he said to the monarch, —

"Until to-day, O king, this sacredness has been sealed from the generations that forsook the religion of Quetzal'. Eye of mocker has not seen, nor foot of unbeliever trod this purlieu, the last to receive his blessing. You alone — I am of the god — you alone can go abroad knowing what is here. Never before were you so nearly face to face with the Ruler of the Winds! And now, with what force a servant may, I charge you, by the glory of the Sun, respect this house; and when you think of it, or of what here you have seen, be it as friend, lover, and worshiper. If the king will follow me, I am ready."

"I am neither mocker nor unbeliever. Lead on," replied Montezuma.

And after that, the king paid no attention to the chamber; he moved along the aisles too unhappy to be curious. The twenty thousand warriors had not been mentioned by Tecetl; they had not, it would seem, entered the city or the battle, so there was a chance of the victory; yet

was he hopeless, for never a doubt had he of her story. Wherefore, his lamentation was twofold, — for his people and for himself.

And Mualox was silent as the king, though for a different cause. To him, suddenly, the object of his life put on the garb of quick possibility. Quetzal', he was sure, would fill the streets of Cholula with the dead, and crown his wrath amid the ruins of the city. In the face of example so dreadful, none would dare oppose him, not even Montezuma, whose pride broken was next to his faith gained. And around the new-born hope, as cherubs around the Madonna, rustled the wings of fancies most exalted. He saw the supremacy of Quetzal' acknowledged above all others, the Cû restored to its first glory, and the silent cells re peopled. O happy day! Already he heard the courtyard resounding with solemn chants as of old; and before the altar, in the presence-chamber, from morn till night he stood, receiving offerings, and dispensing blessings to the worshipers who, with a faith equal to his own, believed the ancient image the ONE SUPREME GOD.

At the head of the eastern steps of the temple, as the king began the descent, the holy man knelt, and said, —

“For peace to his people let the wise Montezuma look to Quetzal'. Mualox gives him his blessing. Farewell.”



VI

THE CONQUEROR WILL COME



FEW weeks more, — weeks of pain, vacillation, embassies, and distracted councils to Montezuma ; of doubt and anxiety to the nobles ; of sacrifice and ceremonies by the priests ; of fear and wonder to the people. In that time, if never before, the Spaniards became the one subject of discourse throughout Anahuac. In the *tianguetz*, merchants bargaining paused to interchange opinions about them ; craftsmen in the shops entertained and frightened each other with

stories of their marvelous strength and ferocity ; porters, bending under burdens, speculated on their character and mission ; and never a waterman passed an acquaintance on the lake, without lingering awhile to ask or give the latest news from the Holy City, which, with the best grace it could, still entertained its scourgers.

What Malinche — for by that name Cortes was now universally known — would do was the first conjecture ; what the great king intended was the next.

As a matter of policy, the dismal massacre in Cholula accomplished all Cortes proposed ; it made him a national terror ; it smoothed the causeway for his march, and held the gates of Xoloc open for peaceful entry into Tenochtitlan. Yet the question on the many tongues was, Would he come ?

And he himself answered. One day a courier ran up the great street of Tenochtitlan to the king's palace ; immediately the portal was thronged by anxious citizens. That morning Malinche began his march to the capital, — he was coming, was actually on the way. The thousands trembled as they heard the news.

After that the city was not an hour without messengers reporting the progress of the Spaniards, whose every step and halt and camping-place was watched with the distrust of fear and the sleeplessness of jealousy. The horsemen and footmen were all numbered ; the personal appearance of each leader was painted over and over



again with brush and tongue ; the devices on the shields and pennons were described with heraldic accuracy. And though, from long service and constant exposure and repeated battles, the equipments of the adventurers had lost the freshness that belonged to them the day of the departure from Cuba ; though plumes and scarfs were stained, and casques and breastplates tarnished, and good steeds tamed by strange fare and wearisome marches, nevertheless the accounts that went abroad concerning them were sufficiently splendid and terrible to confirm the prophecies by which they were preceded.

And the people, made swift by alarm and curiosity, outmarched Cortes many days. Before he reached Iztapalapan, the capital was full of them ; in multitudes, lords and slaves, men, women, and children, like Jews to the Passover, scaled the mountains, and hurried through the valley and across the lakes. Better opportunity to study the characteristics of the tribes was never afforded.

All day and night the public resorts — streets, houses, temples — were burdened with the multitude, whose fear, as the hour of entry drew nigh, yielded to their curiosity. And when, at last, the road the visitors would come by was settled, the whole city seemed to breathe easier. From the village of Iscalpan, so ran the word, they had boldly plunged into the passes of the Sierra, and thence taken the directest route by way of Tlalmanalco. And now they were at Ayotzinco, a town on the eastern shore of lake Tezcuco ; to-

morrow they would reach Iztapalapan, and then Tenochtitlan. Not a long time to wait, if they brought the vengeance of Quetzal'; yet thousands took canoes, and crossed to the village, and, catching the first view, hurried back, each with a fancy more than ever inflamed.

A soldier, sauntering down the street, is beset with citizens.

"A pleasant day, O son of Huitzil'!"

"A pleasant day; may all that shine on Tenochtitlan be like it!" he answers.

"What news?"

"I have been to the temple."

"And what says the *teotuctli* now?"

"Nothing. There are no signs. Like the stars, the hearts of the victims will not answer."

"What! Did not Huitzil' speak last night?"

"Oh, yes!" And the warrior smiles with satisfaction. "Last night he bade the priests tell the king not to oppose the entry of Malinche."

"Then what?"

"Why, here in the city he would cut the strangers off to the last one."

And all the citizens cry in chorus, "Praised be Huitzil'!"

Farther on the warrior overtakes a comrade in arms.

"Are we to take our shields to the field, O my brother?" he asks.

"All is peaceful yet, — nothing but embassies."

"Is it true that the lord Cacama is to go in state, and invite Malinche to Tenochtitlan?"

"He sets out to-day."

"Ha, ha! Of all voices for war, his was the loudest. Where caught he the merchant's cry for peace?"

"In the temples; it may be from Huitzil'."

The answer is given in a low voice, and with an ironic laugh.

"Well, well, comrade, there are but two lords fit, in time like this, for the love of warriors, — Cuitlahua and Guatamozin. They still talk of war."

"Cuitlahua, Cuitlahua!" And the laugh rises to boisterous contempt. "Why, he has consented to receive Malinche in Iztapalapan, and entertain him with a banquet in his palace. He has gone for that purpose now. The lord of Cojohuaca is with him."

"Then we have only the 'tzin!"

The fellow sighs like one sincerely grieved.

"Only the 'tzin, brother, only the 'tzin! and he is banished!"

They shake their heads, and look what they dare not speak, and go their ways. The gloom they take with them is a sample of that which rests over the whole valley.

When the Spaniards reached Iztapalapan, the excitement in the capital became irrepressible. The cities were but an easy march apart, most of it along the causeway. The going and coming may be imagined. The miles of dike were covered by a continuous procession, while the lake, in a broad line from town to town, was darkened by canoes. Cortes' progress through the streets of

Iztapalapan was antitypical of the grander reception awaiting him in Tenochtitlan.

In the latter city there was no sleep that night. The *tianguetz* in particular was densely filled, not by traders, but by a mass of newsmongers, who hardly knew whether they were most pleased or alarmed. The general neglect of business had exceptions; at least one portico shone with unusual brilliancy till morning. Every great merchant is a philosopher; in the midst of calamities, he is serene, because it is profit's time; before the famine, he buys up all the corn; in forethought of pestilence, he secures all the medicine: and the world, counting his gains, says delightedly, What a wise man! I will not say the Chalcan was of that honored class; he thought himself a benefactor, and was happy to accommodate the lords, and help them divide their time between his palace and that of the king. It is hardly necessary to add, that his apartments were well patronized, though, in truth, his *pulque* was in greater demand than his *choclatl*.

The drinking-chamber, about the close of the third quarter of the night, presented a lively picture. For the convenience of the many patrons, tables from other rooms had been brought in. Some of the older lords were far gone in intoxication; slaves darted to and fro, removing goblets, or bringing them back replenished. A few minstrels found listeners among those who happened to be too stupid to talk, though not too sleepy to drink. Every little while a newcomer would enter,

when, if he were from Iztapalapan, a crowd would surround him, allowing neither rest nor refreshment until he had told the things he had seen or heard. Amongst others, Hualpa and Io' chanced to find their way thither. Maxtla, seated at a table with some friends, including the Chalcan, called them to him; and, as they had attended the banquet of the lord Cuitlahua, they were quickly provided with seats, goblets, and an audience of eager listeners.

"Certainly, my good chief, I have seen Malinche, and passed the afternoon looking at him and his people," said Hualpa to Maxtla. "It may be that I am too much influenced by the 'tzin to judge them; but, if they are *teules*, so are we. I longed to try my javelin on them."

"Was their behavior unseemly?"

"Call it as you please. I was in the train when, after the banquet, the lord Cuitlahua took them to see his gardens. As they strode the walks, and snuffed the flowers, and plucked the fruit; as they moved along the canal with its lining of stone, and stopped to drink at the fountains, — I was made feel that they thought everything — not merely my lord's property, but my lord himself — belonged to them; they said as much by their looks and actions, by their insolent swagger."

"Was the 'tzin there?"

"From the *azoteas* of a temple he saw them enter the city; but he was not at the banquet. I heard a story showing how he would treat the strangers, if he had the power. One of their

priests, out with a party, came to the temple where he happened to be, and went up to the tower. In the sanctuary one of them raised his spear and struck the image of the god. The pabas threw up their hands and shrieked; he rushed upon the impious wretch, and carried him to the sacrificial stone, stretched him out, and called to the pabas, 'Come, the victim is ready!' When the other *teules* would have attacked him, he offered to fight them all. The strange priest interfered, and they departed."

The applause of the bystanders was loud and protracted; when it had somewhat abated, Xoli, whose thoughts, from habit, ran chiefly upon the edibles, said, —

"My lord Cuitlahua is a giver of good suppers. Pray, tell us about the courses" —

"Peace! be still, Chalcan!" cried Maxtla, angrily. "What care we whether Malinche ate wolf-meat or quail?"

Xoli bowed; the lords laughed.

Then a gray-haired cacique behind Io' asked, "Tell us rather what Malinche said."

Hualpa shook his head. "The conversation was tedious. Everything was said through an interpreter, — a woman born in the province Pailnalla; so I paid little attention. I recollect, however, he asked many questions about the great king, and about the Empire, and Tenochtitlan. He said his master, the governor of the universe, had sent him here. He gave much time, also, to explaining his religion. I might have understood



him, uncle, but my ears were too full of the rattle of arms."

"What! Sat they at the table armed?" asked Maxtla.

"All of them; even Malinche."

"That was not the worst," said Io' earnestly. "At the same table my lord Cuitlahua entertained a band of beggarly Tlascalan chiefs. Sooner should my tongue have been torn out!"

The bystanders made haste to approve the sentiment, and for a time it diverted the conversation. Meanwhile, at Hualpa's order, the goblets were refilled.

"Dares the noble Maxtla," he then asked, "tell what the king will do?"

"The question is very broad." And the chief smiled. "What special information does my comrade seek?"

"Can you tell us when Malinche will enter Tenochtitlan?"

"Certainly. Xoli published that in the *tian-guez* before the sun was up."

"To be sure," answered the Chalcan. "The lord Maxtla knows the news cost me a bowl of *pulque*."

There was much laughter, in which the chief joined. Then he said gravely, —

"The king has arranged everything. As advised by the gods, Malinche enters Tenochtitlan day after to-morrow. He will leave Iztapalapan at sunrise, and march to the causeway by the lake shore. Cuitlahua, with Cacama, the lord of

Tecuba, and others of like importance, will meet him at Xoloc. The king will follow them in state. As to the procession, I will only say it were ill to lose the sight. Such splendor was never seen on the causeway."

Ordinarily the mention of such a prospect would have kindled the liveliest enthusiasm; for the Aztecs were lovers of spectacles, and never so glad as when the great green banner of the Empire was brought forth to shed its solemn beauty over the legions, and along the storied street of Tenochtitlan. Much, therefore, was Maxtla surprised at the coldness that fell upon the company.

"Ho, friends! One would think the reception not much to your liking," he said.

"We are the king's, — dust under his feet, — and it is not for us to murmur," said a sturdy cacique, first to break the disagreeable silence. "Yet our fathers gave their enemies bolts instead of banquets."

"Who may disobey the gods?" asked Maxtla.

The argument was not more sententious than unanswerable.

"Well, well!" said Hualpa. "I will get ready. Advise me, good chief: had I better take a canoe?"

"The procession will doubtless be better seen from the lake; but to hear what passes between the king and Malinche, you should be in the train. By the way, will the 'tzin be present?"

"As the king may order," replied Hualpa.

Maxtla threw back his look, and said with enthusiasm, real or affected, "Much would I like to see and hear him when the Tlascalans come flying their banners into the city! How he will flame with wrath!"

Then Hualpa considerably changed the direction of the discourse.

"Malinche will be a troublesome guest, if only from the number of his following. Will he be lodged in one of the temples?"

"A temple, indeed!" And Maxtla laughed scornfully. "A temple would be fitter lodging for the gods of Mictlan! At Cempoalla, you recollect, the *teules* threw down the sacred gods, and butchered the *pabas* at the altars. Lest they should desecrate a holy house here, they are assigned to the old palace of Axaya'. To-morrow the *tamanes* will put it in order."

Io' then asked, "Is it known how long they will stay?"

Maxtla shrugged his shoulders, and drank his *pulque*.

"Hist!" whistled a cacique. "That is what the king would give half his kingdom to know!"

"And why?" asked the boy, reddening. "Is he not master? Does it not depend upon him?"

"It depends upon no other!" cried Maxtla, dashing his palm upon the table until the goblets danced. "By the holy gods, he has but to speak the word, and these guests will turn to victims!"

And Hualpa, surprised at the display of spirit,

seconded the chief: "Brave words, O my lord Maxtla! They give us hope."

"He will treat them graciously," Maxtla continued, "because they come by his request; but when he tells them to depart, if they obey not, — if they obey not, — when was his vengeance other than a king's? Who dares say he cannot, by a word, end this visit?"

"No one!" cried Io'.

"Ay, no one! But the goblets are empty. See! Io', good prince," — and Maxtla's voice changed at once, — "would another draught be too much for us? We drink slowly; one more, only one. And while we drink, we will forget Malinche."

"Would that were possible!" sighed the boy.

They sent up the goblets, and continued the session until daylight.





VII

MONTEZUMA GOES TO MEET CORTES



ON the eighth of November, which no Spaniard, himself a Conquistador, can ever forget ; that day Cortes entered Tenochtitlan.

The morning dawned over Anahuac as sometimes it dawns over the Bay of Naples, bringing an azure haze in which the world seemed set afloat.

“Look you, uncles,” said Montezuma, yet at breakfast, and speaking to his councilors, “they are to go before me, my heralds ; and as Malinche is the servant of a king, and used to courtly styles, I would not have them shame me. Admit them with the *nequen* off. As they will appear before him, let them come to me.”

And thereupon four nobles were ushered in, full-armed, even to the shield. Their helmets were of glittering silver ; their *escaupiles*, or tunics of quilted mail, were stained vivid green, and at the neck and borders sparkled with pearls ; over their shoulders hung graceful mantles of *plumajè*, softer

than cramoisy velvet ; upon their breasts blazed decorations and military insignia ; from wrist to elbow, and from knee to sandal-strap, their arms and legs were sheathed in scales of gold. And so, ready for peaceful show or mortal combat, — his heroes and ambassadors, — they bided the monarch's careful review.

“ Health to you, my brothers ! and to you, my children ! ” he said with satisfaction. “ What of the morning ? How looks the sun ? ”

“ Like the beginning of a great day, O king, which we pray may end happily for you, ” replied Cuitlahua.

“ It is the work of Huitzil' ; doubt not ! I have called you, O my children, to see how well my fame will be maintained. I wish to show Malinche a power and beauty such as he has never seen, unless he come from the Sun itself. Earth has but one valley of Anahuac, one city of Tenochtitlan : so he shall acknowledge. Have you directed his march as I ordered ? ”

And Cacama replied, “ Through the towns and gardens, he is to follow the shore of the lake to the great causeway. By this time he is on the road. ”

Then Montezuma's face flushed ; and, lifting his head as it were to look at objects afar off, he said aloud, yet like one talking to himself, —

“ He is a lover of gold, and has been heard speak of cities and temples and armies ; of his people numberless as the sands. Oh, if he be a man, with human weaknesses, — if he has hope,

or folly of thought, to make him less than a god, — ere the night fall he shall give me reverence. Sign of my power shall he find at every step: cities built upon the waves; temples solid and high as the hills; the lake covered with canoes and gardens; people at his feet, like stalks in the meadow; my warriors; and Tenochtitlan, city of empire! And then, if he greet me with hope or thought of conquest, — then ” — he shuddered.

“And then what?” said Cuitlahua, upon whom not a word had been lost.

The thinker, startled, looked at him coldly, saying, —

“I will take council of the gods.”

And for a while he returned to his *choclatl*. When next he looked up, and spoke, his face was bright and smiling.

“With a train, my children, you are to go in advance of me, and meet Malinche at Xoloc. Embrace him, speak to him honorably, return with him, and I will be at the first bridge outside the city. Cuitlahua and Cacama, be near when he steps forward to salute me. I will lean upon your shoulders. Get you gone now. Remember Anahuac!”

Shortly afterward a train of nobles, magnificently arrayed, issued from the palace, and marched down the great street leading to the Iztapalapan causeway. The house tops, the porticoes, even the roofs and towers of temples, and the pavements and cross-streets, were already occupied by spectators. At the head of the pro-

cession strode the four heralds. Silently they marched, in silence the populace received them. The spectacle reminded very old men of the day the great Axaya' was borne in mournful pomp to Chapultepec. Once only there was a cheer, or, rather, a war-cry from the warriors looking down from the terraces of a temple. So the cortege passed from the city; so, through a continuous lane of men, they moved along the causeway; so they reached the gates of Xoloc, at which the two dikes, one from Iztapalapan, the other from Cojohuaca, intersected each other. There they halted, waiting for Cortes.

And while the train was on the road, out of one of the gates of the royal garden passed a palanquin, borne by four slaves in the king's livery. The occupants were the princesses Tula and Nenetzin, with Yeteve in attendance. In any of the towns of old Spain there would have been much remark upon the style of carriage, but no denial of their beauty, or that they were Spanish born. The elder sister was thoughtful and anxious; the younger kept constant lookout; the priestess, at their feet, wove the flowers with which they were profusely supplied into *ramilletes*, and threw them to the passers-by. The slaves, when in the great street, turned to the north.

"Blessed Lady!" cried Yeteve. "Was the like ever seen?"

"What is it?" asked Nenetzin.

"Such a crowd of people!"

Nenetzin looked out again, saying, "I wish I could see a noble or a warrior."

"That may not be," said Tula. "The nobles are gone to receive Malinche; the warriors are shut up in the temples."

"Why so?"

"They may be needed."

"Ah! was it thought there is such danger? But look, see!" And Nenetzin drew back alarmed, yet laughing.

There was a crash outside, and a loud shout, and the palanquin stopped. Tula drew the curtain quickly, not knowing but that the peril requiring the soldiery was at hand. A vendor of little stone images, — *teotls*, or household gods, — unable to get out of the way, had been run upon by the slaves, and the pavement sprinkled with the broken heads and legs of the luckless *lares*. Aside, surveying the wreck, stood the peddler, clad as usual with his class. In his girdle he carried a mallet, significant of his trade. He was uncommonly tall, and of a complexion darker than the lowest slaves. While the commiserate princess observed him, he raised his eyes; a moment he stood uncertain what to do; then he stepped to the palanquin, and from the folds of his tunic drew an image elaborately carved upon the face of an agate.

"The good princess," he said, bending so low as to hide his face, "did not laugh at the misfortune of her poor slave. She has a friendly heart, and is loved by every artisan in Tenoch-

titlan. This carving is of a sacred god, who will watch over and bless her, as I now do. If she will take it, I shall be glad."

"It is very valuable, and maybe you are not rich," she replied.

"Rich! When it is told that the princess Tula was pleased with a *teotl* of my carving, I shall have patrons without end. And if it were not so, the recollection will make me rich enough. Will she please me so much?"

She took from her finger a ring set with a jewel that, in any city of Europe, would have bought fifty such cameos, and handed it to him.

"Certainly; but take this from me. I warrant you are a gentle artist."

The peddler took the gift, and kissed the pavement, and after the palanquin was gone, picked up such of his wares as were uninjured, and went his way well pleased.

At the gate of the temple of Huitzil' the three alighted, and made their way to the *azoteas*. The lofty place was occupied by pabas and citizens, yet a sunshade of gaudy feather-work was pitched for them close by the eastern verge, overlooking the palace of Axaya', and commanding the street up which the array was to come. In the area below, encompassed by the *Coatapanlli*, or Wall of Serpents, ten thousand warriors were closely ranked, ready to march at beat of the great drum hanging in the tower. Thus, comfortably situated, the daughters of the king awaited the strangers.

When Montezuma started to meet his guests,





the morning was far advanced. A vast audience, in front of his palace, waited to catch a view of his person. Of his policy the mass knew but the little gleaned from a thousand rumors, — enough to fill them with forebodings of evil. Was he going out as king or slave? At last he came, looking their ideal of a child of the Sun, and ready for the scrutiny. Standing in the portal, he received their homage ; not one but kissed the ground before him.

He stepped out, and the sun, as if acknowledging his presence, seemed to pour a double glory about him. In the time of despair and overthrow that came, alas ! too soon, those who saw him, in that moment of pride, spread his arms in general benediction, remembered his princeliness, and spoke of him ever after in the language of poetry. The *tilmatli*, looped at the throat, and falling gracefully from his shoulders, was beaded with jewels and precious stones ; the long, dark-green plumes in his *panache* drooped with pearls ; his sash was in keeping with the mantle ; the thongs of his sandals were edged with gold, and the soles were entirely of gold. Upon his breast, relieved against the rich embroidery of his tunic, symbols of the military orders of the realm literally blazed with gems.

About the royal palanquin, in front of the portal, bareheaded and barefooted, stood its complement of bearers, lords of the first rank, proud of the service. Between the carriage and the doorway a carpet of white cloth was stretched :

common dust might not soil his feet. As he stepped out, he was saluted by a roar of atabals and conch-shells. The music warmed his blood; the homage was agreeable to him, — was to his soul what incense is to the gods. He gazed proudly around, and it was easy to see how much he was in love with his own royalty.

Taking his place in the palanquin, the cortege moved slowly down the street. In advance walked stately caciques with wands, clearing the way. The carriers of the canopy, which was separate from the carriage, followed next; and behind them, reverently, and with downcast faces, marched an escort of armed lords indescribably splendid.

The street traversed was the same Malinche was to traverse. Often and again did the subtle monarch look to paves and housetops, and to the canals and temples. Well he knew the cunning guest would sweep them all, searching for evidences of his power; that nothing would escape examination; that the myriads of spectators, the extent of the city, its position in the lake, and thousands of things not to be written would find places in the calculation inevitable if the visit were with other than peaceful intent.

At a palace near the edge of the city the escort halted to abide the coming.

Soon, from the lake, a sound of music was heard, more plaintive than that of the conchs.

“They are coming, they are coming! The *teules* are coming!” shouted the people; and every heart, even the king’s, beat quicker. Up the street the cry passed, like a hurly gust of wind.





VIII

THE ENTRY



It is hardly worth while to eulogize the Christians who took part in Cortes' crusade. History has assumed their commemoration. I may say, however, they were men who had acquired fitness for the task by service in almost every clime. Some had tilted with the Moor under the walls of Granada ; some had fought the Islamite on the blue Danube ; some had performed the first Atlantic voyage with Columbus ; all of them had hunted the Carib in the

glades of Hispaniola. It is not enough to describe them as fortune-hunters, credulous, imaginative, tireless; neither is it enough to write them soldiers, bold, skillful, confident, cruel to enemies, gentle to each other. They were characters of the age in which they lived, unseen before, unseen since; knights errant, who believed in hippogriff and dragon, but sought them only in lands of gold; missionaries, who complacently broke the body of the converted that Christ might the sooner receive his soul; palmers of pike and shield, who, in care of the Virgin, followed the morning round the world, assured that Heaven stooped lowest over the most profitable plantations.

The wonders of the way from the coast to Iztapalapan had so beguiled the little host that they took but partial account of its dangers. When, this morning, they stepped upon the causeway, and began the march out into the lake, a sense of insecurity fell upon them, like the shadow of a cloud; back to the land they looked, as to a friend from whom they might be parting forever; and as they proceeded, and the water spread around them, wider, deeper, and upbearing denser multitudes of people, the enterprise suddenly grew in proportions, and challenged their self-sufficiency; yet, as I have heard them confess, they did not wake to a perfect comprehension of their situation, and its dangers and difficulties, until they passed the gates of Xoloc: then Tenochtitlan shone upon them, — a city of enchantment! And

then each one felt that to advance was like marching in the face of death, at the same time each one saw there was no hope except in advance. Every hand grasped closer the weapon with which it was armed, while the ranks were intuitively closed. What most impressed them, they said, was the silence of the people; a word, a shout, a curse, or a battle-cry would have been a relief from the fears and fancies that beset them; as it was, though in the midst of myriad life, they heard only their own tramp, or the clang and rattle of their own arms. As if aware of the influence, and fearful of its effect upon his weaker followers, Cortes spoke to the musicians, and trumpet and clarion burst into a strain which, with beat of drum and clash of cymbal, was heard in the city.

“*Ola*, Sandoval, Alvarado! Here, at my right and left!” cried Cortes.

They spurred forward at the call.

“Out of the way, dog!” shouted Sandoval, thrusting a naked *tamene* over the edge of the dike with the butt of his lance.

“By my conscience, Señores,” Cortes said, “I think true Christian in a land of unbelievers never beheld city like this. If it be wrong to the royal good knight, Richard, of England, or that valorous captain, the Flemish Duke Godfrey, may the saints pardon me; but I dare say the walled towns they took, and, for that matter, I care not if you number Antioch and the Holy City of the Sepulchre among them, were not to be put in comparison with this infidel stronghold.”

And as they ride, listening to his comments, let me bring them particularly to view.

They were in full armor, except that Alvarado's squire carried his helmet for him. In preparation for the entry, their skillful furbishers had well renewed the original lustre of helm, gorget, breast-plate, glaive, greave, and shield. The plumes in their crests, like the scarfs across their breasts, had been carefully preserved for such ceremonies. At the saddle-bows hung heavy hammers, better known as battle-axes. Rested upon the iron shoe, and balanced in the right hand, each carried a lance, to which, as the occasion was peaceful, a silken pennon was attached. The horses, opportunely rested in Iztapalapan, and glistening in mail, trod the causeway as if conscious of the terror they inspired.

Cortes, between his favorite captains, rode with lifted visor, smiling and confident. His complexion was bloodless and ashy, a singularity the more noticeable on account of his thin, black beard. The lower lip was seamed with a scar. He was of fine stature, broad-shouldered, and thin, but strong, active, and enduring. His skill in all manner of martial exercises was extraordinary. He conversed in Latin, composed poetry, wrote unexceptionable prose, and, except when in passion, spoke gravely and with well-turned periods.¹ In argument he was both dogmatic and convincing, and especially artful in addressing soldiers, of whom, by constitution, mind, will, and courage,

¹ Bernal Diaz, *Hist. of the Conq. of Mexico*.



he was a natural leader. Now, gay and assured, he managed his steed with as little concern and talked carelessly as a knight returning victorious from some joyous passage of arms.

Gonzalo de Sandoval, not twenty-three years of age, was better looking, having a larger frame and fuller face. His beard was auburn, and curled agreeably to the prevalent fashion. Next to his knightly honor, he loved his beautiful chestnut horse, Motilla.¹

Handsomest man of the party, however, was Don Pedro de Alvarado. Generous as a brother to a Christian, he hated a heathen with the fervor of a crusader. And now, in scorn of Aztec treachery, he was riding unhelmed, his locks, long and yellow, flowing freely over his shoulders. His face was fair as a gentlewoman's, and neither sun nor weather could alter it. Except in battle, his countenance expressed the friendliest disposition. He cultivated his beard assiduously, training it to fall in ringlets upon his breast, — and there was reason for the weakness, if such it was; yellow as gold, with the help of his fair face and clear blue eyes, it gave him a peculiar expression of sunniness, from which the Aztecs called him *Tonitiah*, child of the Sun.²

And over what a following of cavaliers the leader looked when, turning in his saddle, he now and then glanced down the column, — Christobal de Oli, Juan Velasquez de Leon, Francisco de

¹ Bernal Diaz, *Hist. of the Conq. of Mexico.*

² *Ibid.*

Montejo, Luis Marin, Andreas de Tapia, Alonzo de Avila, Francisco de Lugo, the Manjarezes, Andreas and Gregorio, Diego de Ordas, Francisco de Morla, Christobal de Olea, Gonzalo de Dominguez, Rodriques Magarino, Alonzo Hernandez Carrero, — most of them gentlemen of the class who knew the songs of Rodrigo, and the stories of Amadis and the Paladins!

And much shame would there be to me if I omitted mention of two others, — Bernal Diaz del Castillo, who, after the conquest, became its faithful historian, and Father Bartolomé de Olmedo,¹ sweet singer, good man, and devoted servant of God, the first to whisper the names of Christ and the Holy Mother in the ear of New Spain. In the column behind the cavaliers, with his assistant, Juan de las Varillas, he rode bareheaded, and clad simply in a black serge gown. The tinkle of the little silver bell, which the soldiers, in token of love, had tied to the neck of his mule, sounded amid the harsher notes of war, like a gentle reminder of shepherds and grazing flocks in peaceful pastures near Old World homes.

After the holy men, in care of a chosen guard of honor, the flag of Spain was carried; and then came the artillery, drawn by slaves; next, in close order, followed the crossbowmen and arquebusiers, the latter with their matches lighted. Rearward still, in savage pomp and pride, strode the two thousand Tlascalans, first of their race to bear shield and fly banner along the causeway into

¹ Bernal Diaz, *Hist. of the Conq. of Mexico.*

Tenochtitlan. And so the Christians, in order of battle, but scarcely four hundred strong, marched into a capital of full three hundred thousand inhabitants, swollen by the innumerable multitudes of the valley.

As they drew nigh the city, the cavaliers became silent and thoughtful. With astonishment, which none of them sought to conceal, they gazed at the white walls and crowded houses, and, with sharpened visions, traced against the sky the outlines of temples and temple-towers, more numerous than those of papal Rome. Well they knew that the story of what they saw so magnificently before them would be received with incredulity in all the courts of Christendom. Indeed, some of the humbler soldiers marched convinced that all they beheld was a magical delusion. Not so Cortes.

“Ride on, gentlemen, ride on!” he said. “There is a question I would ask of a good man behind us. I will rejoin you shortly.”

From the artillerists he singled a soldier.

“Martin Lopez! Martin Lopez!”

The man came to him.

“Martin, look out on this lake. Beareth it resemblance to the blue bays on the southern shore of old Spain? As thou art a crafty sailor, comrade mine, look carefully.”

Lopez raised his morion, and, leaning on his pike, glanced over the expanse.

“Señor, the water is fair enough, and, for that, looks like bayous I have seen without coming so

far ; but I doubt if a two-decker could float on it long enough for Father Olmedo to say mass for our souls in peril."

"Peril! Plague take thee, man! Before the hour of vespers, by the Blessed Lady, whose image thou wearest, this lake, yon city, its master, and all thou seest here, not excepting the common spawn of idolatry at our feet, shall be the property of our sovereign lord. But, Martin Lopez, thou hast hauled sail and tacked ship in less room than this. What say'st thou to sailing a brigantine here?"

The sailor's spirit rose ; he looked over the lake again.

"It might be done, it might be done!"

"Then, by my conscience, it shall be! Confess thyself an Admiral to-night."

And Cortes rode to the front. Conquest might not be, he saw, without vessels ; and true to his promise, it came to pass that Lopez sailed, not one, but a fleet of brigantines on the gentle waters.

When the Christians were come to the first bridge outside the walls, their attention was suddenly drawn from the city. Down the street came Montezuma and his retinue. Curious as they were to see the arch-infidel, the soldiers kept their ranks ; but Cortes, taking with him the cavaliers, advanced to meet the monarch. When the palanquin stopped, the Spaniards dismounted. About the same time an Indian woman, of comely features, came forward.

“Stay thou here, Marina,” said Cortes. “I will embrace the heathen, then call thee to speak to him.”

“*Jésu!*” cried Alvarado. “There is gold enough on his litter to furnish a cathedral.”

“Take thou the gold, Señor; I choose the jewels on his mantle,” said De Ordas.

“By my patron saint of excellent memory!” said Sandoval, lisping his words, “I think for noble cavaliers ye are easily content. Take the jewels and the gold; but give me that train of stalwart dogs, and a plantation worthy of my degree here by Tezcuco.”

So the captains talked.

Meantime, the cotton cloth was stretched along the dike. Then on land and sea a hush prevailed.

Montezuma came forward, supported by the lords Cuitlahua and Cacama. Cortes met him half-way. When face to face, they paused, and looked at each other. Alas, for the Aztec then! In the mailed stranger he beheld a visitant from the Sun, — a god! The Spaniard saw, wrapped in the rich vestments, only a man, — a king, yet a heathen! He opened his arms: Montezuma stirred not. Cuitlahua uttered a cry to Huitzil’, and caught one of the extended arms. Long did Cortes keep in mind the cacique’s look at that moment; long did he remember the dark brown face, swollen with indignation and horror. Alvarado laid his hand on his sword.

“Peace, Don Pedro!” said Cortes. “The knave knows nothing of respectable customs. Instead of

taking to thy sword, bless the Virgin that a Christian knight hath been saved the sin of embracing an unbeliever. Call Marina."

The woman came, and stood by the Spaniard, and in a sweet voice interpreted the speeches. The monarch expressed delight at seeing his visitors, and welcomed them to Tenochtitlan; his manner and courteous words won even Alvarado. Cortes answered, acknowledging surprise at the beauty and extent of the city, and in token of his gratification at being at last before a king so rich and powerful begged him to accept a present. Into the royal hand he then placed a string of precious stones, variously colored, and strongly perfumed with musk. Thereupon the ceremony ended. Two of the princes were left to conduct the strangers to their quarters. Resuming his palanquin, Montezuma himself led the procession as far as his own palace.

And Cortes swung himself into the saddle. "Let the trumpets sound. Forward!"

Again the music, — again the advance; then the pageant passed from the causeway and lake into the expectant city.

Theretofore, the Christians had been silent from discipline, now they were silent from wonder. Even Cortes held his peace. They had seen the irregular towns of Tlascala, and the pretentious beauty of Cholula, and Iztapalapan, in whose streets the lake contended with the land for mastery, yet were they unprepared for Tenochtitlan. Here, it was plain, wealth and power and

time and labor, under the presidency of genius, had wrought their perfect works, everywhere visible: under foot, a sounding bridge, or a broad paved way, dustless, and unworn by wheel or hoof; on the right and left, airy windows, figured portals, jutting balconies, embattled cornices, porticoes with columns of sculptured marble, and here a palace, there a temple; overhead pyramidal heights crowned with towers and smoking braziers, or lower roofs, from which, as from hanging gardens, floated waftures sweet as the perfumed airs of the Indian isles; and everywhere, looking up from the canals, down from the porticoes, houses, and pyramids, and out of the doors and windows, crowding the pavement, clinging to the walls, — everywhere the PEOPLE! After ages of decay I know it has been otherwise; but I also know that conquerors have generally found the builders of a great state able and willing to defend it.

“St. James absolve me, Señor! but I like not the coldness of these dogs,” said Monjarez to Avila.

“Nor I,” was the reply. “Seest thou the women on yon balcony? I would give my helmet full of ducats, if they would but once cry, ‘*Viva España!*’”

“Nay, that would I if they would but wave a scarf.”

The progress of the pageant was necessarily slow; but at last the spectators on the temple of Huitzil’ heard its music; at last the daughters of the king beheld it in the street below them.

“Gods of my fathers!” thought Tula, awed and trembling, “what manner of beings are these?”

And the crossbowmen and arquebusiers, their weapons and glittering iron caps, the guns, and slaves that dragged them, even the flag of Spain, — objects of mighty interest to others, — drew from Nenetzin but a passing glance. Very beautiful to her, however, were the cavaliers, insomuch that she cared only for their gay pennons, their shields, their plumes nodding bravely above their helms, their armor of strange metal, on which the sun seemed to play with a fiery love, and their steeds, creatures tamed for the service of gods. Suddenly her eyes fixed, her heart stopped; pointing to where the good Captain Alvarado rode, scanning with upturned face the great pile, “Oh, Tula, Tula!” she cried. “See! There goes the blue-eyed warrior of my dream!”

But it happened that Tula was, at the moment, too much occupied to listen or look. The handsome vendor of images, standing near the royal party, had attracted the attention of Yeteve, the priestess.

“The noble Tula is unhappy. She is thinking of” —

A glance checked the name.

Then Yeteve whispered, “Look at the image-maker.”

The prompting was not to be resisted. She looked, and recognized Guatamozin. Not that only; through his low disguise, in his attitude,

his eyes bright with angry fire, she discerned his spirit, its pride and heroism. Not for her was it to dispute the justice of his banishment. Love scorned the argument. There he stood, the man for the time; strong-armed, stronger-hearted, prince by birth, king by nature, watching afar off a scene in which valor and genius entitled him to prominence. Then there were tears for him, and a love higher, if not purer, than ever.

Suddenly he leaned over the verge, and shouted, "Al-a-lala! Al-a-lala!" and with such energy that he was heard in the street below. Tula looked down, and saw the cause of the excitement,—the Tlascalans were marching by! Again his cry, the same with which he had so often led his countrymen to battle. No one took it up. The companies inside the sacred wall turned their faces, and stared at him in dull wonder. And he covered his eyes with his hands, while every thought was a fierce invective. Little he then knew how soon, and how splendidly, they were to purchase his forgiveness!

When the Tlascalans were gone, he dropped his hands, and found the — mallet! So it was the artisan, the image-maker, not the 'tzin, who had failed to wake the army to war! He turned quickly, and took his way through the crowd, and disappeared; and none but Tula and Yeteve ever knew that, from the *teocallis*, Guatamozin had witnessed the entry of the *teules*.

And so poor Nenetzin had been left to follow

the warrior of her dream ; the shock and the pleasure were hers alone.

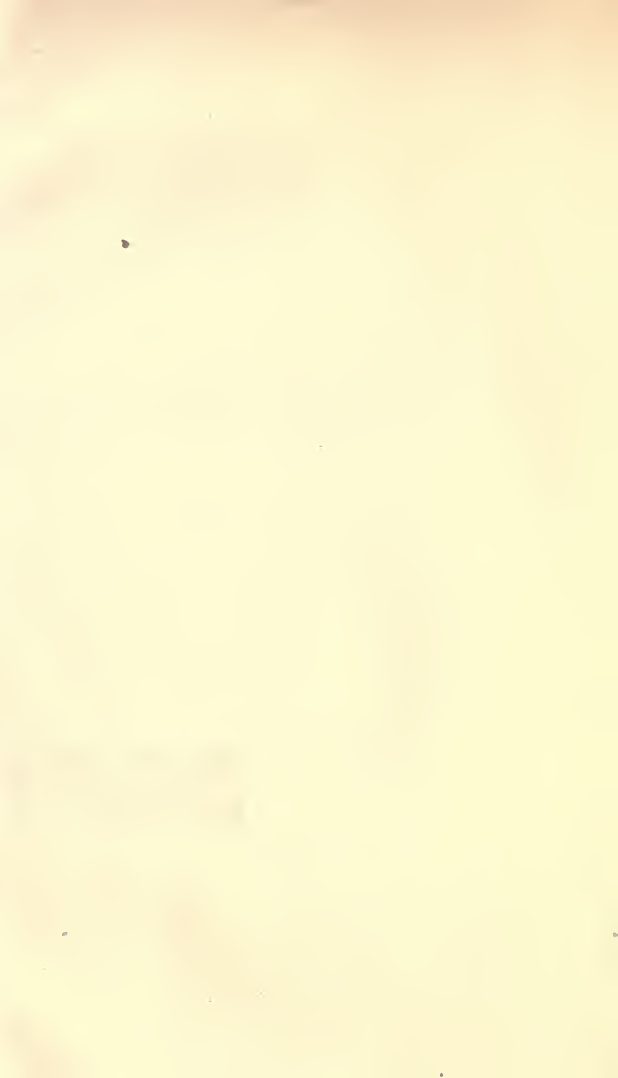
The palace of Axaya' faced the temple of Huitzil' on the west. In one of the halls Montezuma received Cortes and the cavaliers ; and all their lives they recollected his gentleness, courtesy, and unaffected royalty in that ceremony. Putting a golden collar around the neck of his chief guest, he said, "This palace belongs to you, Malinche, and to your brethren. Rest after your fatigues ; you have much need to do so. In a little while I will come again."

And when he was gone, straightway the guest so honored proceeded to change the palace into a fort. Along the massive walls that encircled it he stationed sentinels ; at every gate planted cannon ; and, like the enemy he was, he began, and from that time enforced, a discipline sterner than before.

The rest of the day the citizens, from the top of the temple, kept incessant watch upon the palace. When the shades of evening were collecting over the city, and the thousands, grouped along the streets, were whispering of the incidents they had seen, a thunderous report broke the solemn stillness ; and they looked at each other, and trembled, and called the evening guns of Cortes "Voices of the Gods."







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